

5 NZ 처음
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Elsword Time Trouble Volume 5

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0. Fight of Despair, Start

Capital Velder.

This had been a bustling capital city of the Velder Kingdom. But it was now currently occupied by the demon army. Those that united to take this city back from the demons were the Velder Liberation Army.

Velder Liberation army's command center.

"It's been a while Sir Penensio."

"I'm sorry for returning late Ms. Vanessa"

Vanessa who had been commanding the Velder defense forces and Penensio who just returned from Hamel greeted each other.

"Let me introduce you. These people are....."

"That's enough greetings. We already met anyways."

Add cut off Penensio trying to introduce the party then approached the strategy map to look down at it.

"There's almost no losses compared to before. Were there no engagements since then?"

"Yes, thanks to court magician putting up the barrier, demons are unable to come out from Velder."

"I see...."

So what Aisha said about how she took care of the problem in Velder wasn't a lie.

Add was deep in thought looking at the map when Vanessa looked at the other members and asked.

"You have one more person than last time."

"Hello, my name is Chung. I decided to join the El Search Party and fight together with them. Nice to meet you."

"Ah, could you be Hamel's....?"

Vanessa must have heard about Chung's name before because she made a surprised expression. But Chung politely shook his head.

“You don’t have to treat me as Hamel’s lord right now. I just intend to help with liberating Velder as member of the El Search Party.”

“Thank you for coming all this way to help.”

Vanessa thanked politely. Add who was observing snapped.

“How long are you going to greet each other? We should come up with a plan soon as possible.”

“Ah, that’s....”

Vanessa looked troubled as she trailed her words. Her gaze was directed towards behind Add’s back.

“Potatoes here taste great as always.”

“Yes, it’s great.”

“Ara, don’t eat so hastily. You’ll choke. Here, have some water.”

“Aren’t you going to eat Big Brother Add?”

Add groaned after hearing the voices coming from behind him. Those guys were the ones that were eating but for some reason it felt like he was the one who should apologize.

“.....Meals during the trip weren’t very good.”

“I think it’s better for us to continue after the meal.”

Penensio spoke and tried to leave. Add shook his head.

“Let those guys eat. We’ll start right away with just us. Tell me everything starting with the most recent developments.”

“Alright. Then I’ll start. Since all of you left....”

After hearing Vanessa’s explanation, Add organized only the key points.

“So there were no engagements but you sent some people inside to gather intelligence. And according to the intel, Elesis is staying put only in the outer castle’s 3rd floor?”

“About captain Elesis....”

“I explained it to you already before. Don’t ask any further.”

Add spoke strongly when Penensio brought Elesis up.

Add told him while returning from Hamel that they had to face off against Elesis in Velder. That she sided with the demons for an unknown reason.

“Alright, it’s time to finish things with Big Sis.”

Elsword deliciously swallowed his potato then clenched his fist.

Add noticed potato crumbs on Elsword’s mouth and frowned. He gestured towards Elsword with his finger telling him to wipe it.

“Hmm? Is there something on my face?”

“.....”

I told him to clean up his mouth, why is he rubbing his cheek? While thinking this, Add was about to say something when Eve took out her handkerchief and wiped Elsword’s mouth with it.

“Eat more carefully.”

“Ah, on my mouth. Thanks Eve.”

“.....”

No, couldn’t she have just handed him the handkerchief? Why does she have to clean it up for him? Add glared at Elsword with a scary expression.

Seeing this, Ara quickly handed Add a steamed potato.

“Mr.Add was hungry too right? Here, eat up.”

“.....Haaaa.”

His mind had been already on edge from hunger. Then Elsword hit his nerves and Ara couldn’t read the atmosphere and hit it again. He couldn’t tell if this place was a strategy meeting or a mealtime in some poor countryside.

Rena spoke just in time when Add was about to explode.

“You said Velder’s royal castle was composed of inner and outer castle right? And ruler of the outer castle is Elesis?”

“Yes, although she almost never shows herself.”

“I also know the internal structures of the Velder castle. I think I can be of help in this plan.”

Rena’s hand was slightly pressing down on Add’s shoulder. Add who was about to explode in anger couldn’t help but to follow along with the conversation.

“If it’s about castle’s inner structures, wouldn’t the knights know as well?”

“Knights are not permanent residents of the castle. But I had a chance to stay there for couple of days before.”

“Just as Ms.Rena said, we don’t actually know all the details about the castle’s inner structures. And those who knew were....during the invasion....”

“I’m not sure as well.”

Just like Vanessa said, Velder defense forces were a group that fought enemies invading from the outside. They weren’t castle’s security guards.

Penensio also didn’t seem to have had much interest in that department. Although they had sent spies inside, it was too much for them to figure out the castle’s inner structures as well.

Thus, it was a situation where no one knew the castle’s inner structures too well. But a random unexpected person had known instead.

“.....How do you know?”

Add looked questionably at Rena then asked.

Actually, only people like architects should have been interested in an inner structure of a building that they didn’t even reside in. But according to Rena’s words, she, an elf had a chance to spend her days in the royal castle?

“I stayed there couple of days with Raven before.”

“What? Do you mean....that Raven?”

“Leader of the Crow mercenaries?”

Penensio and Vanessa got shocked and asked Rena.

“Is he that famous?”

“Yes, I wouldn’t be standing here if it weren’t for his valiant actions during the 3 Days Rebellion.”

“He’s an outstandingly skilled individual. There’s almost no one that can match up to him in Elrios.”

Vanessa and Penensio looked like they couldn’t hide their excitement for a moment then suddenly became quiet. Add noticed this and tilted his head.

At this point, shouldn’t they say something like how great it would be if someone so skilled participated in this liberation effort? Why do they all look like as if they’ve sinned?

“But he’s.....”

“Hmm, that’s not true. Raven made up his mind now.”

Rena quietly shook her head. Vanessa looked like she wanted to say something more but Rena smiled and changed the topic.

It meant that this topic ended here.

“So I think I can be of some help in taking back the Velder royal castle.”

“.....I see. We’ll be thankful for your assistance.”

It was an unnatural end of the conversation but Vanessa didn’t speak about it further. It was as if bringing up Raven was forbidden.

When the atmosphere turned awkward, Add lightly opened up the map.

“So, what are we going to do from now on? You couldn’t be thinking that we should face them head on right?”

“Of course not. Our forces are too lacking.”

“Also, it’s not just captain Elesis. There are also reports of seeing Chloe and rumors of seeing other generals such as Karis and Ran.”

“So they are all bunched up in there.”

Add clicked his tongue as he looked down on the map. He then took a slight glance sideways at Ara. Ara’s face was calm despite how Ran’s name was mentioned.

“What’s wrong Mr.Add?”

“.....It’s nothing.”

Add snatched the potato that Ara was still holding out to him then chomped down on it. He had to take care of his hunger first if he wanted to think properly.

“Court magician told us that if we are successful in stopping the demon army’s process of turning El in the throne room into a Dark El, most demons will lose their power and get banished back into the demon realm.”

“Aisha did?”

Add didn’t know if such a thing was possible but if that purple magician had said so, then it won’t be a lie. In that case, they should obviously try to stop them from changing the El inside the inner castle into a Dark El. But demons should be guarded against this as well.

“Direct confrontation won’t work no matter what. Then we should....”

Add unconsciously dragged his words when he felt everyone’s gazes focus on him. Penensio, Vanessa and the other El Search Party members were all waiting for his words.

Their gazes were as if they were anticipating the plan he will put forth.

“.....Infiltration.”

Add spoke awkwardly after feeling his heart tickle strangely. Elsword spoke as if he understood.

“Oh, that?”

“It’s the same plan we used in Elder.”

“We have to sneak into the castle, defeat the generals while evacuating the people right?”

“But will infiltrating into the enemy territory go so well?”

Ara nodded to assure Chung when he asked with a worry filled expression.

“We’ll all go together so there’s no need to worry!”

“Ah, I see.”

Add pressed his palm down on his forehead at how the group was conversing so energetically. Chung had at least managed to bring up a sensible opinion.....but he immediately got caught up by what Ara said.

Since when did the El Search Party’s atmosphere become like this? No, had it always been like this?

“I’m not done explaining. Listen up. There are couple problems we have to address. First is Elesis. We avoid fighting her much as possible, even if we must, we’ll face her very last. You all should know why already.”

“You don’t have to worry about me, Big Brother Add.”

“I’m not worrying about you. We have three main objectives, evacuating the civilians trapped inside the castle, stopping the enemy from turning the El into a Dark El and finally defeating the demons and liberating the royal castle. Depending on the situation, we’ll give up on the last objective.”

“Give up?”

Eve questioned with a puzzled expression.

“I’m not saying we’ll give it up on it forever. I’m just saying that we should handle all of them separately. Just from the intel we already have, we have Ran, Karis, Chole and Elesis all together in there. We don’t know what else might be in there so trying to defeat them all at once is reckless. We avoid engagement much as possible, and face Elesis if it’s absolutely necessary.”

“.....I got it Big Brother.”

Elsword understood what Add said then nodded.

“But if it comes down to it.... Leave it to me.”

“I don’t know how things are going to turn out in there so I can’t make any promises.”

Add cut Elsword off then went back to the main topic.

“Second, the generals. Karis and Ran knows our faces. Getting found out by them will ruin the whole plan.”

“Yes, then we should disguise ourselves.”

“I see.”

“That’s right Mr.Add!”

Add became uncomfortable when Ara spoke while smiling brightly. The atmosphere became strange for some reason.

“We’ll have to use the same method we used in Elder.”

“Let’s prepare right away.”

“I’ll help much as I can too!”

What did they do.....in Elder again? A chill went down Add’s spine as he recalled.

“Chung, you should do it together too.” Rena asked Chung enticingly.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“.....No. I’m never doing that again!”

Add shouted but Eve spoke calmly.

“It’s an effective disguise.”

“Never again!”

He won’t cross-dress no matter what.

Add managed to avoid cross-dressing after a desperate resistance. After finally getting a breather, Add exited the tent and looked around.

Atmosphere of the soldiers had become quite brighter. It’s probably because the Velder Knights had joined up.

“Liberation huh....”

Add muttered then turned around abruptly after feeling a sudden presence. Rena had followed without him realizing. She had already playfully locked her arm with Add's and was sending him a wink.

Add got surprised by the soft sensation on his arm and pulled it back as if his arm just got burned.

"Ah, I just wanted take a stroll with you."

"Just say what you came to say."

"Hmm, so Add doesn't want to take a stroll with me?"

Add put his hands in his pockets and ignored Rena's sad looking face. He could now tell from a mile away that this was a prank and.....

"Speak up already if this is about Raven."

"....."

He already had a hunch what she wanted to talk about. When Rena made a helpless smile, Add spoke again while looking up towards the night sky.

"Don't say it if you don't want to. I won't question anything."

"Yes, Add did never ask why Raven won't regroup with us....."

This was something Add had been always curious about. Rena and Raven had been traveling together since long before. Rena should have at least been curious about how there was no news from Raven for so long. But Rena had never shown such signs.

No matter what she was thinking, she hadn't shown any signs.

"Add, you should have also figured out from the conversation before. You can't say that Raven likes the Velder Kingdom. Raven lost everything because of the Velder Kingdom. More accurately, it was because of something a noble in the Velder Kingdom did..... But you should know well that it's difficult for people to distinguish these things."

"....."

It felt as if Rena was choosing her words very carefully.

"I see, so what? Are you trying to say that Raven isn't returning to the El Search Party because of his past? He's not helping because he has a grudge against the Velder Kingdom?"

Add turned his head to glare at Rena.

"You know very well that isn't true."

“H, huh?”

“Stop trying to sound out my thoughts when your mind is already decided. You are trying to convince me while knowing already that’s not the case. You actually want to tell me that Raven isn’t like that. That he has some other circumstances preventing him from regrouping. Don’t drag this on. It’s a waste of time.”

“Ah, that’s.....”

Add shook his head.

“I’ll believe you.”

“.....”

“I don’t know much about that left arm Nasod but I’ll believe what you say. So stop worrying about useless things. You know about the castle’s inner structures and I’ll use that information to turn this liberation mission into a victory.”

Add spoke stiffly at Rena who had a surprised expression.

“You don’t have to reveal everything. We will win this time and unite our strengths for that purpose. That’s enough.”

“Yea, you’re right.”

Rena smiled at Add’s words then nodded. Even though Add was the one who said it, he became somewhat embarrassed by the words he said. He turned his gaze away while muttering.

Add knew very well that Rena always spoke while caring and thinking deeply about others. He didn’t know what kinds of words and feelings Rena had shared with Raven who wasn’t here right now..... But Rena was probably trying to explain the situation to Add because it could cause a problem with Raven regrouping in the future.

‘And it’s obvious that life story of that left arm Nasod wouldn’t have been a good one.....’

Raven was a human with Nasod parts implanted into his body. There was no way he could have led a bright and lively life. He must have a twisted and dark past and that’s probably something related to the Velder Kingdom.

The reason Rena hadn’t brought up Raven’s past before was because she thought it wasn’t something she should say. But she must have thought she couldn’t hide it from Add and the other search party members anymore since Raven’s name was mentioned during the strategy meeting.

.....She was seriously too kind.

Add was thinking deeply but then got surprised from a sudden soft sensation. Add had been deep in thought when Rena used this chance to lightly kiss his forehead.

“.....”

“Looks like Add became able to care about others too. Thanks.”

But nothing came into Add’s ears because he was so flustered. He instinctively glared at Rena because of a sudden feeling that leapt up from his heart.... But Rena was just smiling beamingly.

He’ll be the strange one if he got angry at that smiling face.

“Never....do... something like that again.”

“But I do this to Eve and Ara all the time.”

“Don’t treat me the same. I’m....”

His voice shook the more he talked. When Add swallowed his words, Rena looked sorry as she lowered her head slightly in apology.

“Sorry. I’ll be careful next time. Then I’ll be going now. Let’s all have dinner together later.”

“.....”

When Add didn’t answer, Rena apologized with an eye gesture again then went back inside the tent. Add looked down at his own feet while listening to Rena’s footsteps get further away then furiously scratched his head.

“.....What’s wrong with me?”

Wasn’t it just a light joke? Just like she said, it was something she did for Eve and Ara as well. It was a normal gesture she showed towards cute kids. Add didn’t accept it any differently either.

But separate from how his head understood it.... His heart throbbed and an emotion that was difficult to describe kept flowing up.

The name of that emotion was longing.

It was something that person often did for Add when he was young.

“.....”

Add clenched his fists from the images that he felt like he could recall if he just closed his eyes.

He was almost there. He'll liberate Velder and destroy the demons' schemes..... then everything will end after he steals Eve's core in that absolutely greatest moment.

He just had to wait a little more to meet that person again.

When Add was raising his head after suppressing his surging emotions, he could hear footsteps approaching from behind.

Person with a white hair stood beside him. Nine white tails mocked the night breeze. She placed her hand on top of her eyes to look far towards Velder.

It was Eun.

"That place looks ominous just from a single glance."

".....Isn't it a scene you've seen 20 million times already?"

"There hasn't been too many cases where boy has reached this far. It's a new record this time. Since you arrived here without losing anyone in the El Search Party."

Eun replied slyly. Add scoffed.

"Is that so? Then how many times have I reached here so far?"

"Do you really want to know? Then I'll count it for you."

"....."

"Let's see, hmm....."

When it seemed like she really was counting, Add waved his hand to activate the Dynamos then fired an electric current. But soon as the Dynamo activated, Eun had already performed a back somersault to dodge.

"Attacking without any words? How cruel, boy."

"Be glad that I didn't kill you."

"Ara will die as well if you kill me. So boy cannot kill me. Am I right?"

"....."

Add glared at Eun coldly. Eun was smiling seductively. But to Add she looked more evil than any other demon.

Eun had hidden the fact that Add had time traveled countless times, and also the fact that he lost these memories.

“That’s not the reason I’m leaving you alone right now.”

“So it’s not because of Ara? Then what’s your reason? Could it be that you’ve fallen for me, boy?”

“I don’t know what your goal is. And even if you tell me.....I can’t trust that it’s the truth.”

Eun’s smile disappeared.

“But my goal is clear. I don’t know why I failed countless times before.... But it’s different this time. I’ll create a different result.”

“.....Is that so?”

“Yes, I’ll make use of you and your powers to achieve my goal. If you manipulated me for your own goals, then I’ll also manipulate you for my goals as well.”

It was a haughty declaration. But Eun didn’t object to it.

“That’s rather a good spirit even after finding out the truth, boy.”

“Don’t mock me.”

It wasn’t that he was not enraged at Eun. But it was also true that Eun treasured Ara and she was lending her powers to Add for that reason. Also, Add couldn’t distance himself from Eun for the sake of time traveling.

Even though Eun had hidden the truth of 20 million failures from him, this wasn’t the time to nitpick about that.

As Add glared at the Velder royal castle far off in the distance, Eun stood beside him and whispered quietly.

“I’m honestly praising you. You rightfully deserve praise for challenging again despite knowing that you failed horrible amount of times. I should praise you.....since I’m the only one in the world who knows boy is trying so desperately.....”

“.....”

Eun smiled from Add’s hateful gaze.

“Then, shall we start? This final battle where we sing out our despair?”

Fox declared while looking towards the night, towards the darkness.

“In order to surpass the end of time.”

The 2nd Velder liberation attempt started.

1. Destruction Overture

Velder outer castle.

Add looked dissatisfied as he leaned on the hallway's wall while touching the clothes he was wearing. This suit was uncomfortable but all the males in here wore it so it couldn't be helped.

".....Well it's still better than you."

"How did it come to....?"

Chung was standing beside Add while blankly looking down at his own feet. His long golden hair fit well with the two tone black and white maid uniform. He looked like a beautiful girl even for Add who knew the truth.

Add recalled the event in Elder that he didn't want to recall. It wasn't like Add, but he offered some words of comfort to Chung.

"It couldn't be helped. Condition for this infiltration is to not be noticed. Guys like you will attract too much attention."

"But I am a guy. Just why.....?"

Chung protested while pressing down on the hem of his skirt. But a guy that looks like a girl is more likely to attract attention than just a regular girl. Chung must have been conscious of this himself as well because he was sighing heavily while looking extremely depressed.

His feelings must have been quite hurt.....so it's probably better to not say anything to him for a while.

Clack.

"Okay, we're all ready."

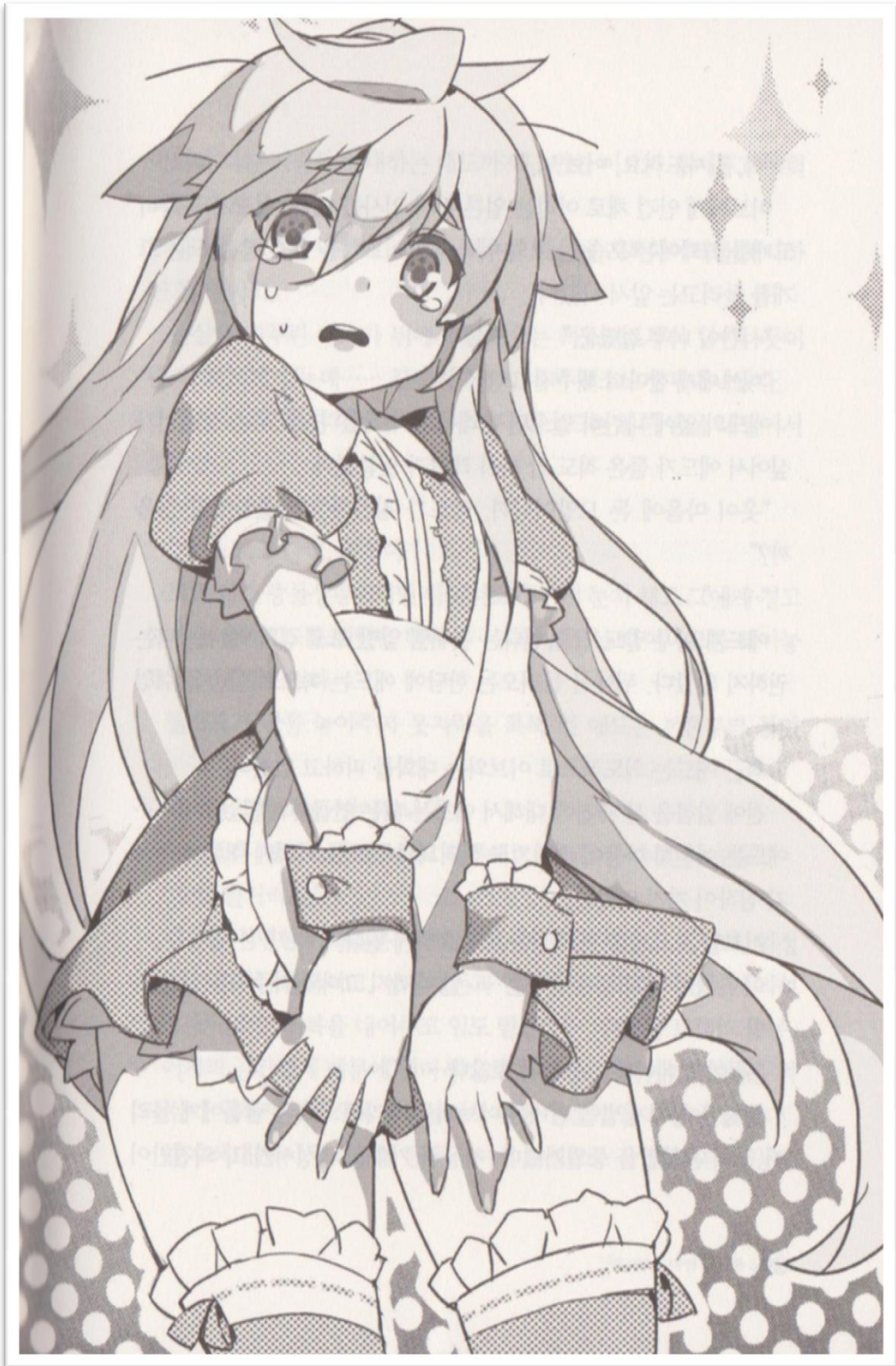
Rena exited the room and smiled brightly. Black and white maid uniform enhanced her beauty.

Rena saw Chung then made a very joyful expression.

"Chung, you look so pretty no matter how many times I see you."

".....I really didn't want to do this."

This was an infiltration mission so attracting attention was troublesome. Chung was reluctantly accepting this situation only because of this single reason. He wasn't enjoying this at all. Rena smiled as she was about to say some words of comfort to Chung who looked dejected, then Ara and Eve came out of the room as well.



“We’re finished.”

“We’re ready now.”

Ara walked out of the room politely then smiled after noticing Add’s gaze. She then tripped on a door sill. Ara was about to fall with a surprised expression when Eve grabbed Ara’s waist to catch her from falling.

“Be careful, Ara.”

“Ah, thank you Ms.Eve.”

Ara quickly thanked Eve while still in her arm. Add stole a quick glance at how Eve was nodding silently then also at Eve and Ara’s maid uniforms. He then turned his head away to start moving.

“This wasted too much time.”

“How about giving some words of compliment to Eve ?”

Rena whispered to Add as she walked up right beside him. Add ignored her while wondering what prank she was planning again. Rena added.

“It seems she really liked those clothes. Wouldn’t she be glad if Add complimented her?”

“.....”

Rena didn’t say anything more when Add continued walking as if he hadn’t heard anything. Add sighed internally while hearing the idle chatter coming from behind him.

Add had been recently purposely avoiding talking to Eve.

Eve didn’t bring up the incident where Add saw her bare naked body anymore.....

But Add still felt uneasy about that incident and still couldn’t get a grasp on how he should handle Eve.

He became uneasy whenever he saw Eve.

He didn’t know what kind of emotion this was.....so he wanted to avoid facing her much as possible until he figured it out.

“Well, don’t I have more than enough data already.....?”

Add murmured to himself after hearing Eve offer words of comfort to dejected Chung. It was true that Eve became very intriguing and charming after her appearance and attitude towards other people changed.

But all of these could be analyzed from data logs after he collect her core.



Ara quickly thanked Eve while still in her arm.

Add frowned then started walking faster as if he was running away.....But Elsword suddenly appeared out of the corner.

Add lost his balance from the direct collision. Elsword quickly reached out to grab Add.

“Sorry about that.”

“Watch where you’re going, idiot.”

Normally, this kind of collision would have been avoided because Dynamo should have noticed and warned him beforehand..... But Add didn’t have his Dynamos with him right now.

When Elsword let him go, Add wiped the dust off his clothes then asked for the important thing first.

“So did you get the jobs?”

“Yea, it’s just like we heard. They will provide lodging and give 2,000ED daily.”

“That’s a generous offer.”

Demons that captured Velder were using an appeasement policy. Not only were they enforcing strict public order but they also handed out uniforms and gave jobs to the citizens that needed money if they came to the outer castle.

Since the citizens couldn’t leave because of the spatial barrier, they had no choice but to gather at the outer castle to get jobs from the demons in order to make a living.

The El Search Party were successful in mixing into these job seekers to infiltrate the outer castle.

“Still their security is too lacking.”

“It seems there haven’t been any problems even though they opened up the outer castle to the citizens. Velder Liberation army hadn’t been making a move after all. Demons must have thought no one would infiltrate since they can’t leave once they enter.”

“Hmm....”

Add’s Dynamo, his dimension distortion mode could block things from coming in but couldn’t stop things from going out. This spatial barrier that Aisha put over Velder was the opposite.

“Although, now we can’t leave either.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll take care of that if it comes down to it.”

Add already confirmed that his quantum teleport can go through Aisha’s spatial barrier. This was because Aisha taught him space related formulas. You could say this spatial barrier had the same principles as Add’s abilities.

Add's curiosity as a researcher peaked. He could probably figure out the exact mechanisms behind this spatial barrier if he was given enough time.

Chung who had been listening asked very quietly.

"So what do we have to do Elsword?"

"I told them there were six of us then they told us to work in pairs of two. They'll come to check on our progress before the sun sets. Two for cleaning the East windows, two for cleaning the North storage and....."

Elsword spoke as if this was difficult to bring up.

"When they heard Big Sister Rena was an Elf, they told her to be Chloe's bathing attendant."

".....You mean the Dark Elf."

Rena's expression turned grim after hearing the name she heard during the strategy meeting again. Add didn't know what kind of relationship Elves had with Dark Elves but judging from Rena's reaction they must not have a friendly relationship.

"Decline if you don't like it. Just stay in the hideout."

Outer castle was rather open to the citizens so the demons didn't say anything if citizens quit because they didn't like the work they were given. There were plenty of other workers anyways.

Rena shook her head at Add's suggestion.

".....Hmm, no. I want to talk to her to figure out why Dark Elves are siding with the demons. Also, she'll know about the inner castle well since she's a general. I'll figure it out from her carefully."

"Then we have to split up into pairs of two, how are we going to do this?"

Chloe was a girl so bathing attendant that goes together with Rena must be a girl as well. Add organized the situation.

"Rena, take Ara. Chloe might get suspicious if she figures out Elf and Nasod are traveling together. She doesn't know our faces but there's a high chance she knows information about us."

"Okay, got it. Ara, let's go together."

"Yes, Ms.Rena!"

Then that leaves window and storage cleaning. Storage work should obviously go to those with good strength right?

Basically, Elsword and Chung. Although Chung was dressed as a girl, he had the strength to freely wield a Destroyer.

Then that leaves Add and Eve.

Add didn't like this result from the elimination rule and was about to speak up. But Elsword spoke faster.

"Then Chung and I will go to the storage. Big Brother Add and Eve take care of the windows."

"Don't break anything when you are cleaning, Elsword." Eve warned Elsword.

"I don't do that anymore."

"Then let's all gather information and see each other again at night."

Rena, Ara, Elsword and Chung all parted and went to do their jobs. Add carefully looked at Eve after being left alone with her. Eve held her hand out towards Add without an expression.

Rag was in her hand.

"Then let's start cleaning."

".....Alright."

He had been avoiding being alone together with her but they ended up being together.

Window cleaning started.

Cleaning the windows that were the size of three people standing beside each other was quite difficult.

First of all, Add wasn't a physical working type. He had always solved things that required physical efforts by commanding his Dynamos.

"Huff, huff....."

So getting exhausted after only a third window was definitely not Add's fault. They were in disguise right now. This was just a trivial issue that occurred because he had to move around without his Dynamos in order to hide everyone's weapons and clothes with optical camouflage.

"Are you tired?"

".....W, who's tired?!"

Add protested in a surge of rage and moved his hands busily. But judging by his arms shivering every time he moved, a future where he'll suffer from terrifying muscle pain tomorrow awaited him.

5th window.

“Rest for a bit if you are tired.”

“.....”

He didn't even have the strength to respond now. Eve looked at Add who was panting heavily with a very pitiful gaze.

.....His frustration was surging up but his body couldn't follow up.

“Take a break, Add.”

“Wait, let's rest for a bit together.”

There were hundreds of windows just on the West side of the castle. Seriously? We have to clean all of these to get just 2,000ED? Just when Add was burning up with his hatred towards the demons.....Eve dropped her rag and stood beside Add who was sitting.

“You.....”

Just when Add turned around to talk, Eve's white thighs came directly into his view. Add quickly looked forwards again.

“I didn't think Queen of Nasods would do this kind of petty work so willingly.”

“It has to be done in order to not look suspicious.”

Eve answered trivially to Add's mockery. She became much more mature compared to the days when she responded angrily to Add's light provocations.

.....Honestly, Add felt pathetic towards himself for mocking. When Add stayed quiet, Eve spoke to him this time.

“So what kind of information should we gather exactly?”

“Outer castle's security, geography, situation inside the inner castle and whereabouts of Elesis. I want to confirm that she really rarely comes down from the third floor.”

Other generals were problematic as well but Elesis was their biggest problem.

Of course, Ran, Karis, Chloe and Helputt..... they were all powerful individuals that needed attention but the person that worried Add the most was Elesis.

“Will we be able to defeat Elesis?”

“.....We won't run into her if possible in this mission.”

They had to fight so many powerful enemies. He wanted to avoid clashing with Elesis much as possible. He wanted to carry out this plan safely as possible.

“Did you ask Ara about Memory of Time and Space?”

“She wasn’t able to explain it well.”

It was the same for Eve, but Ara also didn’t know how she had awakened her Memory of Time and Space. Well, he shouldn’t have expected any explaining skills from Ara.

Eve and Ara awakened their Memory of Time and Space. Only ones remaining were Add and Elsword.

“Even if Elsword succeeds, he probably won’t be able to explain it either.”

“....”

That was obviously right. Add realized the situation after hearing what Eve said. This wasn’t a mechanism that could be done by following the instructions of people that have already succeeded.

This was because people other than Add were not very knowledgeable about emotions or too forthright.

Only thing Add managed to find out from the success of two people was that emotion was a clue to awakening the Memory of Time and Space.

“If Elesis, or an even more powerful enemy that surpasses her stands in our way, you and Elsword will both have to awaken the Memory of Time and Space.”

“I know already.”

Add answered coldly while grabbing the El inside his pocket. Even though Eve and Ara’s battle capabilities rose tremendously, this Velder royal castle was still filled with powerful enemies.

Elsword and Add had to awaken their Memory of Time and Space to increase the El Search Party’s battle capabilities.

But Add had done various researches ever since Eve’s awakening, and tried various attempts but didn’t get any results.

“Ara and I both activated it while fighting. So don’t worry about it right now.”

“What?”

“I’m saying you don’t have to worry too much about it beforehand.”

Could it be that...Eve was trying to comfort him? Add got surprised and turned around towards Eve, then he became even more surprised. Eve must have decided that the break was over and was stretching up her arm to clean the top part of the window.

Doing that while wearing a maid uniform with such a short skirt... looked very perilous to Add who was sitting down.

“Uh...”

Surprised, Add quickly stood up and snatched away the rag Eve was holding. Eve looked confusedly at Add after getting her cleaning tool taken away. Then Add quietly started cleaning the upper window parts that Eve was having trouble cleaning.

“I’ll clean the top.”

Add was taller so he should be able to clean the top part much easier than Eve. Eve nodded then picked up the other rag.

“Thank you, Add.”

“Kukukuk.....”

After laughing instinctively, Add hesitated then said something else. He hadn’t intended on saying something like this but,

Just to poke around and get the conversation going.

“Those clothes.....they look rather good on you.”

“What do you mean?”

“.....”

‘You lied to me Rena!! Just you wait!!’

When Add became red up to his ears while screaming and shouting internally, Eve spoke as she nodded slightly.

“Thank you.”

“.....”

Add desperately looked at the window and focused on cleaning with all his might. His arms were exhausted and hurt as if they were about to fall off. But he was glad of this right now.

Because pain helped to hide from Eve the tip of his mouth trying to dance on its own.

Rena and Ara got undressed and put towels around their bodies as they got led to where Chloe was bathing.

Judging from the blindingly white tiles on the floor, this was a bath that normally only nobles staying in the royal castle would have used. Chloe was inside the bathtub with the water coming up to her shoulders. She opened only one eye to look at Rena and Ara.

“I’m surprised that there was actually an Elf in Velder.”

“And I’m surprised to meet a Dark Elf here.”

“.....Is that how it’s going to be? Fine.”

Chloe frowned for a moment at Rena’s confident reply but nodded as if she wasn’t going to care. Rena looked around the bathroom as they talked.....there was no one else here but Chloe.

She was completely defenceless.

Even if Chloe was a demon general, she wouldn’t be able to escape unscathed if Rena and Ara attacked her right now. Of course, Rena and Ara also didn’t have their weapons at the moment.....

‘Hmm, no.....’

Their goal right now wasn’t to eliminate an enemy general. They had to act carefully while watching out for not only Chloe but other generals as well.

Rena closed this line of thought then spoke to Chloe while smiling.

“So I heard we’ll be your bathing attendants? What do we have to do?”

“Not much, just massage my shoulders.”

“Okay!”

Ara who was looking around the bathroom in admiration quickly nodded then moved behind Chloe’s back. But she didn’t take into account that the floor was slippery from the moisture.....so her feet slipped and she fell forwards.

“Ah?!”

Of course like the trained martial artist she was, she broke the fall with her right hand to avoid being hurt..... But her left hand ended up striking down on Chloe’s shoulder.

“Ouch!”

“A, are you okay?”

Ara got surprised from Chloe’s scream and quickly withdrew her hand. Chloe looked back with tear filled eyes as she grinded her teeth from the pain.

“What? How can a human girl be so strong?”

“Ah, umm... that’s because...”

Ara got flustered and was having trouble answering so Rena quickly stepped up to take care of it.

“She became like that because she went through a lot while traveling with me. Also, I think only one bathing attendant should be more than enough. Why don’t we talk 1 on 1?”

“What does that mean?”

“Do you think that I, an Elf would have come to Velder for no reason at all?”

Ara got surprised by Rena’s bold words and tried to call out to her but stopped. Ara couldn’t hide her nervousness and stared at Chloe’s back.

Ara didn’t know what Rena was thinking but she might have to take down Chloe if necessary.

“So what are you saying?”

“I wanted to talk about why a Dark Elf sided with the demons and is invading Elrios. Wouldn’t it be nice for a light bath time chat?”

“Hmm.....”

Chloe seemed like she was thinking for a moment then waved her hand towards Ara. Ara who had been looking nervously at Rena exited the bathroom with a worried expression.

Chloe chuckled when the bathroom door closed.

“Hahaha, I found it strange that an Elf came to the outer castle..... So you came to meet me after all?”

“Yes, thank you for calling me here, Chloe.”

Chloe was a Dark Elf so she became curious when she heard that an Elf came to the outer castle looking for work. That’s why she called Rena here. Rena also had something she wanted to find out from Chloe..... So they had to talk eventually. Also, Rena needed to approach Chloe somewhat boldly to attract her curiosity.

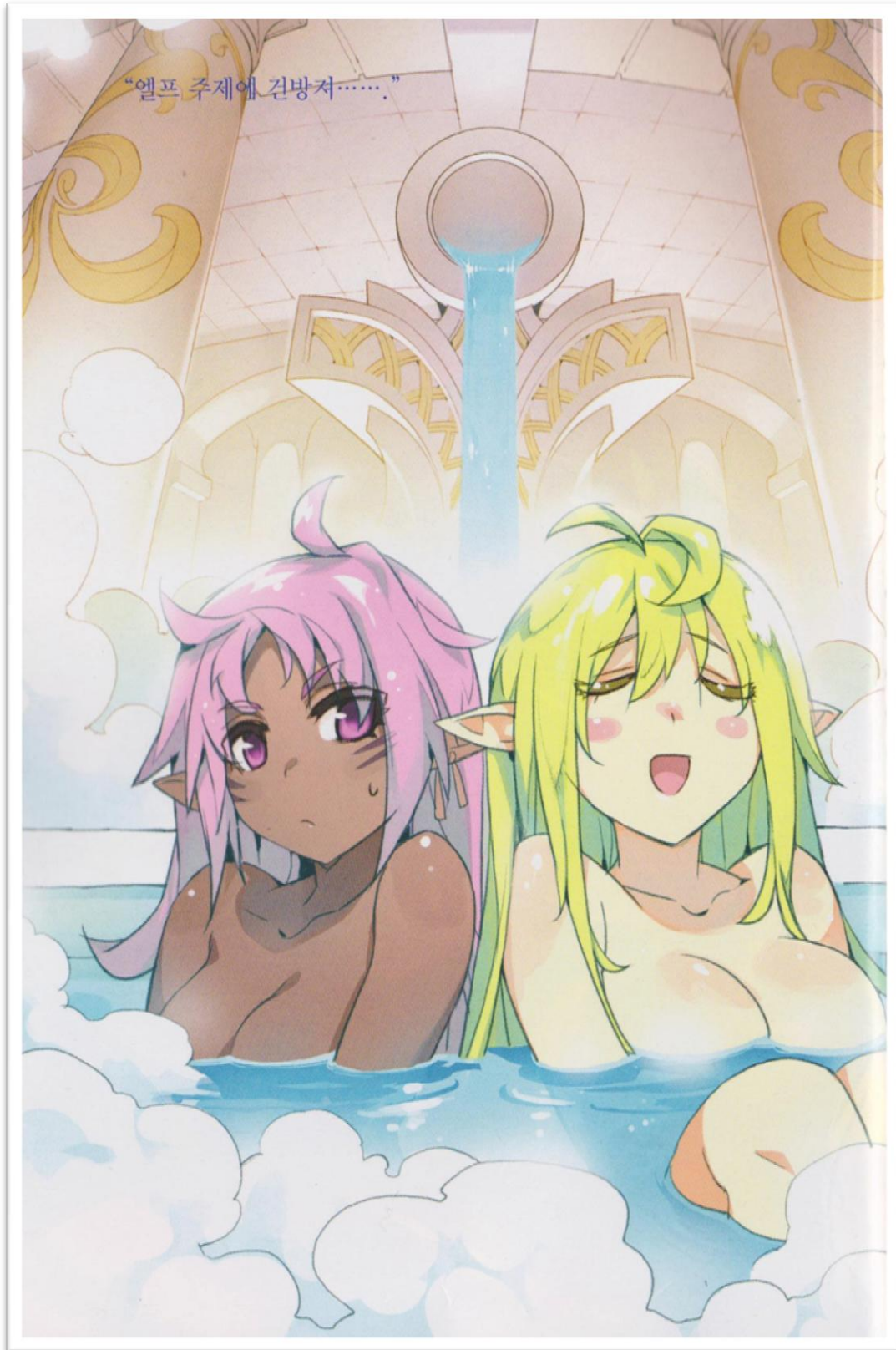
Even if doing so brought about significant danger.

“Fine, Dark Elf and an Elf talking to each other is a rare event in history. Come in.”

“Okay.”

Rena carefully took off the towel and entered the bathtub. Water was warm with just the right temperature so it felt soothing.

But Chloe across the bathtub looked at Rena’s chest area then frowned.



“You’re just a mere Elf, how impudent.....”

“You’re just a mere Elf, how impudent....”

“Is there a problem?”

Chloe was muttering then got surprised when Rena nonchalantly changed her position. Rena now sat with her shoulder touching Chloe’s as if it was nothing special.

“Sitting like this is easier for talking right?”

“How shameless.... As to be expected from an Elf.”

For a demon general to bathe shoulder to shoulder with an Elf woman she met just today. Chloe looked dumfounded by this fact but Rena was just smiling sociably as if nothing was wrong.

Chloe felt like getting angry at this smiling face would only make her the small-minded person. If an Elf came to her being this boldly and openly..... Then as a Dark Elf, shouldn’t she counter composedly as well?

“Hmph, so what business do you have sauntering about into Velder? Was it really just to talk? You should know that I can get rid of you easily if I wanted to.”

Just as she said, this was a deadly place. Even though demons were using appeasement policy in the outer castle, it didn’t change the fact that they were the conquerors and that they were demons.

But Rena smiled softly at Chloe’s stern warning.

“That’s something to think about after we finish our talk. Also, I won’t go down so easily either.”

“.....I see. So why did an Elf that should always stay dillydallying in the forest come out into the world? I’m telling you this now. I don’t think there’s a way for you to leave Velder now that you’ve come in.”

“Yes, I came to meet you knowing that.”

Rena’s warm attitude didn’t change despite how Chloe continued to warn threateningly. When Chloe closed her mouth while frowning, Rena asked instead this time.

“How come Dark Elves are assisting the demon invasion of Elrios? Isn’t it your people’s duty to protect the Demon Realm’s sacred site and the Dark Elf?”

“That was true before. But it’s not the time for such things anymore.”

“How come? Did something happen in the Demon Realm?”

At Rena’s question, Chloe hesitated for a moment but answered willingly.

“The Dark Elf’s energy is weakening.”

“.....What?”

Rena got so shocked that she stood up.

In the first place, the reason why Rena left the Forest of the Elves was because the El's energy was weakening. Then she met Raven and travelled together with him until they joined the El Search Party. This was Rena's journey so far.

“You must be quite surprised. Sit down, Elf.”

“.....”

This time Chloe was the one who was smiling as she spoke. It was a complicated smile where she was enjoying Rena's shocked reaction but feeling sorrowful about this topic at the same time.

When Rena sat down beside her, Chloe scooped up some water with her hand then continued to speak.

“You should already know. But if Elrios is a world blessed by the El, then Demon Realm is a world protected by the Dark El. But Dark El's energy is weakening. There were many different opinions on what to do about this....”

“So is that why you're invading Elrios and trying to change the El into Dark El?”

“That's right.”

Chloe made a cruel smile. Rena didn't hide her pale expression as she protested.

“But doing that will endanger Elrios!”

“It's better than Demon Realm becoming endangered.”

“.....”

Reason for the demon invasion hadn't been clearly known. But according to the story right now, Chloe invaded Elrios with her Dark Elves in order to secure more Dark El.

“This is a fight for survival.”

“.....Do other demons think the same?”

“No, like I said before, there are differing opinions amongst demons as well. This is only from what I heard but one moderate faction demon opposed the invasion then lost all their power and got banished to Elrios and another aggressive faction of demons is plotting to resurrect the Demon God in order to destroy Elrios once and for all.”

“I see....”

Weakening of the Dark El. There must have been numerous opinions amongst the demons with this crisis at hand. Then a faction that suggested they should invade Elrios appeared.... And that was the reason why they invaded Elrios.

“Are you satisfied now after knowing this, Elf?”

“.....I can understand why.”

Rena could finally understand why the demons suddenly invaded Elrios in such a large scale. If the El blesses Elrios, then the Dark El protects the Demon Realm.

Not only the El, but the Dark El was weakening as well.....

“But why did you have to do something like this? You could have explained the situation to Elrios and united our strengths to figure out a solution.”

“Hmph, you’re speaking like an Elf after all. Would your side even have listened to our request? Even if they did, what if we don’t find a solution? Then we’ll have no choice but to take your El.”

“.....”

Rena bit her lips hard as Chloe spoke sharply. Rena looked gentle and kind but she was a warrior who had been through many life threatening battles. Chloe’s words made sense to her.

Chloe was saying that their motives weren’t wrong since this was a competition with their survival on the line.

“.....The El’s energy is weakening as well.”

“What?!”

This time, Chloe got surprised and raised her voice. She must not have known about this because she questioned Rena threateningly. She might have pointed her weapon at Rena if they weren’t bathing.

“You better not be lying to me.”

“No, I’m not. The reason I came out of the forest was to find the reason why the El’s energy is weakening.”

“.....”

Rena slowly shook her head. Chloe must have sensed that Rena was speaking the truth and stopped questioning. This information must have been quite shocking because Chloe couldn’t hide her turmoil and was breathing heavily.

“That’s troublesome. We’ll have to turn all of the El here into Dark El soon as possible.....”

“Then Elrios will be destroyed.”

“Then are you telling me to just watch as the Demon Realm is destroyed? What an Elf like thing to say. If you’re a warrior too then stop speaking with only ideals.”

“I’m saying let’s join our forces now. If the El and Dark El are both losing their energies, then we have to unite our strength and knowledge so that both worlds can survive.”

Rena requested desperately. Chloe shut her mouth and didn’t say anything for a while.

“Chloe, please think about this carefully.”

“.....Stop it, Elf. We already pointed weapons at each other. We’ve come too far to turn back.”

Rena didn’t back out even though Chloe shook her head violently.

“The root of this problem won’t be solved even if you turn all of the El into Dark El. That’s only postponing the destruction.”

“We’ll find the solution to that on our own.”

“Chloe.”

Chloe closed her eyes when Rena called her name sadly.

“Stop, stop it. I’ve already made up my mind to do anything for the sake of the Demon Realm. So stop trying to persuade me with these useless talks if you want to leave here alive.”

“....”

Rena asked again because she wasn’t scared of Chloe’s threat, but from pure regret.

“If....the Demon Realm knew beforehand that the El was weakening as well, will this war have ever happened?”

“.....Probably not.”

The El and Dark El were like two opposite sides of a coin. They both had different properties but couldn’t be separated from each other. If demons had thought more deeply about this fact and researched more thoroughly, there might have been a different future where the demons didn’t invade Elrios and two sides joined their efforts to search for the problem and think of a solution together.

But the war had already started and blood had been split.

“Chloe, please change your mind. If other demon generals find about this too.....”

“Stop it. There’s no reason to stop when we’ve basically won this war. Other generals will mock me and most of all.... D won’t allow it.”

“D?”

Terror flashed by Chloe’s face as she mentioned that name. Rena asked confusedly when it seemed like Chloe wouldn’t listen no matter what.

“Is there someone above the generals?”

“.....I don’t want to talk anymore. Go back.”

Chloe snapped as she closed her eyes. Rena looked at Chloe regrettably then stood up.

“Yes, alright. Then let’s talk again tomorrow, Chloe.”

“.....What? Tomorrow?”

“Our story isn’t over yet right? It’s been a while since Elves have interacted with Dark Elves after all.”

Rena left the bathtub and spoke while smiling. Chloe frowned then clicked her tongue.

“What a cheeky Elf.”

“Then see you tomorrow.”

Rena put a towel around her then left the bathroom. Chloe who was left alone looked at the closed door for a while then shook her head.

“Hmph, turn back after all this?How stupid.”

This was the first time Chloe had heard that the El’s energy was also weakening. Would other generals have known about this?

Well, the warmongering faction could have known about it but kept silent because they wanted war.....

“But there’s no way that D didn’t know.”

She was suspicious but too afraid to confirm it. Chloe sighed then recalled Rena’s face and blinked.

“.....Come to think of it. I never asked for her name.”

Chloe spoke to herself then shook her head soon after.

“No, there’s no reason to know a mere Elf’s name.”

But if what that Elf told her as she left was true, they'll meet again tomorrow. Chloe got a feeling that she'll talk face to face with that Elf again tomorrow.

"Hmph...."

She wasn't fond of Elves, but she was interested in information so she might as well face her again tomorrow.

The day's work was over. The El Search Party earned the right to sleep inside the outer castle because they finished various jobs.

But because there weren't enough guest rooms due to there being so many other workers, they ended up all sleeping in the same room. Lights out bell was heard and everyone rolled out their sleeping bags and lied down.

Soft moonlight came into the room as they all conversed naturally.

"Sleeping all together like this fun too."

"You're right it reminds me of the time when we camped out."

"Want me to make a campfire in the middle?"

"You shouldn't light fire inside a building. Mr.Elsword."

"Good work today everyone."

It was a small room where everyone had to sleep head to head. It was a lodge without any proper beds but everyone looked like they were enjoying it.

Add clicked his tongue as he changed the topic.

"Enough with the small talks. Spit out everything you all found out today."

"Chung and I talked with the other people while cleaning the storage. Everyone....praised Big Sister."

Wouldn't this guy praise Elesis saying it's a magnificent sword skill even if Elesis destroyed the world?

When Add looked at Elsword with a dumfounded expression, Chung denied Add's guess.

"They said the reason why there was no pillaging despite the demon takeover was because Ms.Elesis decided so. Also, she opened up the outer castle like this and took care of the citizens so that they

were not discomforted. All of the Velder citizens working inside the outer castle were praising Ms.Elesis.”

“.....It felt like the fact that Big Sister was on the demons’ side wasn’t very important to the people here.”

Elsword had a very complicated expression. Add read the worry in his voice and asked sharply.

“Don’t tell me that you are thinking Elesis purposely sided with the demons for the sake of Velder’s citizens.”

“.....”

Add asked just in case but judging from the lack of answer, he was right on the mark. Just how much does this kid admire Elesis?

“Don’t get any useless thoughts. No matter what Elesis is thinking, what we have to do doesn’t change.”

“I know. I won’t hesitate when we end up fighting.”

Even though Elsword would worry about the fact that Elesis was his enemy, he wouldn’t hesitate to let his sword do the talking. That was enough.

While Add was feeling satisfied, Ara butted in.

“Me too....no matter what Elder Brother’s reason is.....I’ll stop him no matter what!”

“I...also have to hear the answer from father. I won’t hesitate to fight.”

At the continued words from the group, Add felt dumfounded and spoke.

“Why are there so many of us that have their family member on the enemy’s side?”

“Add.”

Eve called Add out coldly at what he said without a thought. Add waved his hand while still lying down.

“I’m not blaming anyone. I just said it because I’m curious.”

“Maybe it’s destiny?”

Ara spoke hesitantly. Add focused his ears on what Ara was saying. Did she use the foresight ability again?

But that didn’t seem to be the case as Ara carefully continued her words.

“I don’t understand it too well, but it feels like it wasn’t a coincidence that I met and fought alongside all of you.”

“I think so too Big Sister Ara.”

“Yea, me too.”

“Actually, I also think so.....”

Add lightly tapped the floor when even Chung embarrassedly spoke out.

“Don’t change the topic like this. I told you all to share the information you gathered. Why are you all derailing into idle talk?”

“I was able to grasp around half of the outer castle’s structure while cleaning today.”

“I already know that. Let’s take the window cleaning job again tomorrow if possible.

Window cleaning job was rigorous but it was useful. They could move about without attracting suspicions from demons. Thanks to this, they could easily scan the outer castle’s inner structures.

“So Rena, how did your meeting with Chloe go?”

“That’s.....”

Rena seemed to hesitate for a moment then continued her words.

“I think everyone should know after all.”

Everyone became dead silent and listened to Rena’s explanation. They had all fought back against the demon invasion but no one had known the exact reason why the demons did all of this.

“Dark....El?”

“I thought Dark El was an ingredient that’s used to open dimension gates. Aren’t demons using dimension gates for this invasion? Why are they consuming Dark El when they came to secure more?”

Add suspected if this was a misinformation but Rena shook her head.

“I don’t think Chloe lied to me.”

“Demons never used dimension gates however they wished. Damage done to other cities and Hamel was great but they only used the dimension gate once. Now I can understand the reason behind it.”

Add nodded skeptically at Chung’s words. So demons can use dimension gates but they don’t use it unless it’s for something really important.

But that means.....

“Why are you looking at me like that Add?”

“.....”

Why did they attack Eve by investing in dimension gates? The reason why demons didn’t attack Eve again using dimension gates after Elder was understandable. They probably didn’t want to use any more Dark El.

But he couldn’t figure out why they went out of their way to expend even a little bit of Dark El to attack Eve. Of course there had been ambushes through dimension gates after Elder but they were all ambushes aimed at the El Search Party, not Eve alone.

There was a strange entanglement of information.

“I was just organizing my thoughts. Anyways....”

“Then could it be that Elder Brother.....is also siding with the demons to protect the Demon Realm?”

“I don’t think father is someone who’d do that.”

“If that’s what Big Sister wanted to do, she wouldn’t have done it this way.”

Ara, Chung and Elsword didn’t look too convinced either. But it didn’t seem like the information Rena brought was a lie either.

“This is important information but I don’t think we can make any conclusions yet. Let’s discuss this some other time.”

“Okay, I’ll continue talking with Chloe.”

“You might get found out if you get too close to her. Give it up.”

“I feel like I still have to talk with her some more.”

Rena probably means there was something she could gain from talking with Chloe despite the danger. Well, this was Rena so she should be able to handle herself. Add determined this then quietly stood up as he put on his jacket.

“Where are you going?”

“I’ll go scout out their night security.”

Add brought in his Dynamos that were maintaining optical camouflage to hide the group’s weapons and clothes.

“You all go to sleep. I’ll go quietly by myself.”

“Ara, follow him.”

“Okay!”

Eve spoke while ignoring Add’s words. Ara quickly got up from her spot.

Eve answered while not even looking back at Add’s dumbfounded gaze.

“You must be tired from the day’s work. Bring Ara with you just in case.”

“Just leave it to me, Mr.Add!”

Add’s head started to hurt after looking at Ara who was in high spirits.

“It’s not that important of a task, I’ll go by myself....”

“Then be careful Big Brother Add.”

“Contact us if you’re in danger. We’ll come to help.”

“Both of you be careful.”

.....Just quietly bringing her along will probably waste less time.

Outer castle at night.

Add carefully walked along the silent hallways. Even though the outer castle was using an appeasement policy on the citizens and provided food and shelter to the workers, they warned sternly to not walk around at night.

“Next corner will be dangerous.”

Add drew the royal castle’s internal structure he knew so far in his head and decided to take the long way around. Demons would also want to use minimal amount of manpower for their night security. That meant they had no choice but to make effective security lines.

Add saw through their security during the day’s examination so he could respond appropriately right now. Add went far around and tried to move up to the third floor. A worried voice came from behind him.

“Uuuuuu, it’s scarier because it’s so quiet.”

“.....”

Should he ignore her? When Add continued walking as if he hadn't heard anything, Ara asked nervously.

"Aren't you scared Mr.Add?"

"Those that are on night patrol are probably only small fries."

Add couldn't ignore anymore so he answered bluntly. He alone should have been enough for night scouting but now he had an extra baggage because Ara followed unnecessarily.

There was no way a general or lieutenant would be on guard through the night.

"No, I.... I heard a ghost appears in the castle during the night."

"Don't get scared from something so stupid."

Add criticised while frowning but worry didn't leave Ara's voice.

"Umm... all of the Ms.Dark Elves said they saw it."

"....."

Were demons afraid of ghosts just like humans? Add also felt the chills but walked up the stairs leading to the 3rd floor as if he wasn't fazed.

Elesis was supposed to stay in the 3rd floor. Add nervously scanned the area with the Dynamos but there were no life signatures.

"Wouldn't Ms.Elesis be here?"

"I'm getting nothing. But we have to check thoroughly even if it will be dangerous. There's two ways into the inner castle. First is to just boldly go through the main gate and second is using the overpass on the third floor."

It was obvious but the first method will immediately draw attention. All of the demons' attention will focus on them soon as they headed toward the inner castle. Demons will find out that they are the El Search Party and they will instantly get swarmed. It was too dangerous.

But they had to risk running into Elesis if they wanted to use the third floor's overpass. That's why they came to scout it out beforehand. But there was nobody here.

"Strange."

"There's no one here."

"....."

Add didn't answer saying that was the reason why it was strange. Placing Elesis in the 3rd floor which was the route into the inner castle was a proper decision.... But why was it completely empty?

Add stopped walking and thought deeply. Then he asked Ara.

"Do you still have those dreams?"

"No, I became able to control Lord Eun's powers."

"That's good....."

Add haven't talked to Eun after hearing that he failed for more than 20 million times until they arrived in Velder. Naturally, the time he talked to Ara also decreased so this was the first time he asked her about this.

"It's thanks to Mr.Add continuing to care for me. I'm sorry for causing so much trouble for you in Hamel."

"Who was caring? What I meant just now was....."

If they could possibly use Ara's foresight ability to find out if there was some kind of trap on the 3rd floor. But Add closed his mouth in middle of his sentence.

Ara was looking at him seriously.

"I'll fight with all I have to protect all of you even if Elder Brother is my enemy. I could make this decision thanks to Mr.Add, Ms.Eve and everyone else. Thank you."

".....Stop saying useless things."

"I wanted to thank you properly."

Add scratched his head then abruptly turned his head away when Ara being shined upon by the moonlight thanked him while smiling.

"Stop with the nonsense. Just look ahead to see if there's anything strange."

Add scanned carefully as possible to figure out where Elesis was but he couldn't catch anything even from Dynamo's wide area scan.

"I can't see that far out anymore. Lord Eun said I can only look at events short distances ahead."

"Then.... say right away if there's a danger as we walk."

Eun had nonchalantly hidden information from Add..... But her affection towards Ara must be honest. Even if she hid information from Ara, that was probably for Ara's sake.

'Although she has a cruel side.....'

Was Eun ignoring Ara's suffering in Hamel in order to awaken her to Memory of Time and Space?

“.....”

Then why had Eun hidden the fact that Add's memories were missing and why did she tell him now? Was there some kind of reason behind it?

It wasn't the time to think too deeply about this. Add carefully headed to the overpass while being on guard.

He already knew there was nobody on the overpass because he scanned it. The inner castle across the stone bridge was uncomfortably quiet.

Darkness.....was waiting for them in there.

“Mr.Add?”

Add stopped right in front of the overpass after seeing the inner castle. Ara who had been following after Add's footsteps stopped and asked confusedly. Add pressed on his head as his mind became more chaotic and let out a small cry in pain.

He felt uncomfortable and sick.

“.....Uh, kugh.”

“Mr.Add, are you hurt somewhere?”

Add tried to shake Ara's hand off when she held him worriedly but he didn't have the strength to. He felt sick and his head spun dizzily soon as he thought deeply into the gap in his memory.

Just why did he lose his memories?

Did he go insane because he failed so many times? Well, 20 million was an unimaginably large number. He wouldn't have any excuses if someone objectively called him insane.

There was a past that he couldn't remember.

Well, this wasn't something too unlikely. Humans weren't very rational and reasonable creatures..... They could always rationalize and distort their own memories. Don't they forget most of their memories as infants?

In order to forget something so horrible, it wasn't impossible to rewrite one's memory of that time into blankness.

"Haah....."

While sweating heavily, Add struggled not to throw up. Something tired to come up his throat even though he hadn't eaten.

"Mr.Add, it's okay. Stay calm."

"....."

Ara spoke in a low voice while supporting Add who had no strength and couldn't even stand properly from the dizziness. Her face looked like if she was about to cry at any moment. It was as if she wanted to shout but was holding it in because this wasn't the situation to.

"I'll stay beside you."

Add was drenched in sweat and panting. He saw Ara's tear filled eyes looking at him then chuckled.

Ara from before would have gotten flustered from not knowing what to do. She was acting rather composedly now. Did she grow up from the Memory of Time and Space too?

"I'm good, let me go."

".....Will you be okay?"

"To make you worry about me. How low I've fallen."

Add muttered as he put strength into his knees. Cold sweat dripped down his back....but he now could stand on his own two feet. Ara finally let go of Add's arm and stared worriedly. But Add ignored her and stood up straight.

He still felt sick but didn't intend to cry about it.

"Mr.Add, could it be that your wounds aren't fully healed?"

".....No I just felt uncomfortable for a bit. Don't tell the others about this."

Ara didn't answer right away and hesitated when Add said this. It looked like she wanted to ask others for help so Add pressed her for an answer.

"I'll take care of my own business. Don't tell them. Got it?"

".....Okay."

Ara reluctantly nodded. Add collected his breath then turned around to go back the way they came.

He staggered for the first couple of steps but forcing himself to walk seemed to gradually help with his body's condition.

"Phew....."

Ending up like this just from trying to remember about 20 million failures... Add felt dumbstruck and laughed coldly.

"Kukukuk, I must really be crazy....."

It must have been such a hard time that he had to end up sealing his own memories. Add closed his thoughts and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He could think about the failures he had no recollections of....later.

Let's focus only on liberating Velder for now.

After deciding this, Add was about to head back the way they came but his body moved up suddenly. As his body floated up on its own, Add looked blankly at the floor for a moment then noticed that Ara had suddenly kicked the ground to grab Add and started running.

Wow, she's really fast. He would have died instantly if this was an attack.

"Let me g....."

"Shhh!"

Celestial Fox state, Ara's hair had already become white as she warned sternly. She moved inside a room while still carrying Add on her side. Ara dropped Add then looked around the room to find a large closet then quickly opened it.

"Hide, Mr.Add!"

"....."

She probably has a good reason for this. Add didn't question her and entered the closet just like she told him. Then Ara also came inside the closet and carefully closed the door.

It was a large closet but it was still bit too small for two people to hide in. Their foreheads were almost touching. But Add suppressed the stifling feeling and focused on what was going on outside.

Creak.

Seductive voice was heard along with the sound of a door opening.

"Strange, I don't see anyone."

“.....”

It was Karis' voice. She had fought Ara and Add before so she will be able to notice them right away. The whole infiltration and Velder liberation mission was all over if she saw them.

Add and Ara would have to worry about their own lives before that.

Karis seemed to be flying because they heard wings flapping instead of footsteps. They could sense that she was looking around the room.

‘.....This is the worst.’

How come a demon who's a Succubus Queen was personally patrolling the castle during midnight? But he could think about the reason later. Add thought of a countermeasure when the sound of Karis' wings got closer.

Ambushing to get the upper hand should be their final measure. Optical camouflage was useful but it was just a visual trick. It probably wouldn't work on generals.

Add asked with an eye gesture to see if Ara had any plans since she had already looked ahead to see that Karis would appear. But Ara who was focusing on the situation outside suddenly grabbed Add's clothes and pulled him close to her.

Then the sound of air tearing was heard.....as a scythe broke through the place where Add's head was just now.

Crash!!

After being saved from death by just 2 seconds, Add froze up and couldn't even move a finger. Karis' scythe that came in breaking through the closet got pulled out then a voice was heard.

“Did I understand the order wrong?”

“.....”

Although Karis was a demon, she probably doesn't have a hobby of destroying perfectly good furniture for no reason. Her words were as if she came here after receiving unclear information.

She must have given up flying because footsteps were heard and sounds of Karis looking around were heard.

“Did they run away already? Or....did they hide somewhere here?”

It didn't seem like she will give up and leave. If that was the case, they have to stake everything and fight.

He can go back using time travel if it doesn't work out.

Just when Add was about to relay to Ara that they should fight.... Another voice was heard.

“What are you doing here, demon?”

“.....I was just taking a night stroll, human.”

It was Elesis’ voice. When Karis’ footsteps got further, Add examined the situation outside through a crevice between the doors.

Elesis was standing in the hallway, and Karis was standing inside the room as they glared at each other. One could tell they weren’t friendly with each other just from a single glance.

“I manage this place. You shouldn’t be here.”

“But you let Chloe play around all she wants. Why are you discriminating me? Former Ms.Red Knight Captain?”

“.....”

Karis spoke in a sticky voice when Elesis’ expression turned intimidating.

“Are you saying you aren’t going forgive me if I harm humans?”

“Want to try it?”

Elesis grabbed her sword’s hilt as if there was nothing more to talk about. At the atmosphere as if Elesis was going to fight if Karis said anything else, Karis winced for a moment but laughed wickedly after.

“You don’t have to be so serious. I just wanted to have a friendly chat with our new comrade. You should consider my feelings too.”

“I don’t have anything to talk about with you. Don’t come here ever again.”

“Wow....that’s so harsh.”

Karis tilted her head and looked at Elesis.

“What a pretty face. You can be eternally beautiful if you become a demon. I don’t understand why you refuse to become a demon even after joining us.”

“.....”

“Could it be that you have other thoughts? Maybe it looked like you betrayed Elrios but you are actually plotting something else?”

Elesis closed her eyes then took her hand off her sword hilt.

“Stop meddling, demon. I won’t let you off if you do this again.”

“How arrogant.....”

Elesis ignored Karis’s words then turned around. Karis spoke again.

“Come to think of it, that El Search Party that your little brother is in. They defeated Ran in Hamel. They should be arriving in Velder soon.”

They’ve already arrived but the news must have been delayed because of Velder’s spatial barrier. Generals could probably break through the barrier but it didn’t look like they could go in and out as they pleased.

“Will you be able to fight properly when they come to attack us with your brother as their vanguard?”

Slash! There was a flash of light then Karis quickly jumped back. Sword aura slashed past the place where Karis’ head had been just now. Elesis spoke shortly after swinging and withdrawing her sword so quickly that it didn’t look like she had swung her sword at all.

“I won’t miss next time.”

“.....How impatient.”

Unlike what Karis said, her expression was stiff. Her neck would have really gotten chopped off if she dodged just a little late.

It wasn’t clear who was the strongest amongst the demon generals because they haven’t fought each other.

Still, Berthe was weak, Chloe was no match for Ran and Ran was very strong but still under Karis. This kind of unspoken ranking existed. But the ranking wasn’t clear for Elesis and Helputt that just joined recently.

Elesis was an extremely skilled individual that even Karis couldn’t treat lightly. It could work out if Karis risked her life and fought with everything she had. But Elesis was definitely not someone she wanted to provoke just for fun.

“Then.... let’s talk under more leisurely circumstances next time.”

Karis shrugged from Elesis’ cold glare then quickly flew out through the open window in the room.

Elesis put away her sword then entered the room when Karis flew away towards the inner castle.

“.....”

Karis left and now it's Elesis? Ara must have realized Add's dismay as well because she couldn't hide her nervousness and was grabbing her spear tightly. Ara was the one who sent Add an eye gesture this time.

She was saying they should ambush her if it came down to it. But Add shook his head.

Speaking from the experience of having fought both of them..... Elesis was even more dangerous in this situation. Ara wouldn't lose to Karis if it became a close quarter combat but he couldn't imagine Ara being able to beat Elesis.

Of course, Ara had her foresight ability and defeated Ran with her immensely increased skills from awakening to Memory of Time and Space. But they couldn't forget that she could do so only because she had help from Add and the other Search Party members.

"Haah....."

Elesis closed the window Karis exited from then looked around the room. Her gaze remained on the furniture inside the room.

Two inside the closet held their breaths.

".....I should go drink some tea."

Elesis spoke to herself then withdrew her gaze on the furniture as she left the room.

Sound of a door closing was heard. After a long time had passed and footsteps couldn't be heard anymore, Add and Ara both let out a huge sigh.

".....It was so scary."

"That was dangerous."

He had been so nervous that his body was drenched in sweat. Add came out of the closet and felt relieved from the fact that the danger was over. But his brain was working busily even now.

"Elesis and the other generals don't have a very good relationship. Rather, they are hostile....."

Could they use this information somehow to help with liberating Velder? But to use this information to their advantage, they had to know why Elesis sided with the demons. But that won't be easy to find out.

"Karis is already a formidable opponent and Ms.Elesis here too..... Will we be able to win Mr.Add?"

".....We can win."

Ara's worries were obvious. Demon generals were individuals that the El Search Party had to focus their entire efforts on to defeat. But in this Velder, there were not only one but multiple demon generals.

No matter what kind of amazing plan he came up with, there was no meaning to it if the skills of the people carrying out the plan was lacking. Current El Search Party didn't have enough strength to defeat all of the demons crawling in Velder.

But Add spoke with certainty.

"We'll win."

"Ah, of course. Mr.Add and Mr.Elsword both received the El from Ms.Aisha."

Ara's thought was different from Add's but Add didn't bother to correct her. Add looked at the moon hanging up in the night sky through a crack in the closed window then made his resolve.

"I'm going to win this time.....for sure."

He didn't know why he failed 20 million times.

But him from this time will win for sure.

2. Beyond the Darkness

Midday, outer castle's hallway.

“Are you alright Add?”

Add was cleaning the windows when he finally realized Eve had called him and turned his head around.

“You don't look too well.”

“.....Don't mind it.”

Add was deep in thought about something else as he reviewed today's situation.

Eve and Add got the window cleaning job again. Ara and Chung were washing dishes, Elsword was working at the storage.....and Rena went to serve Chloe.

“I'm worried about Rena but I'm sure she can handle herself.”

“.....”

They were in enemy territory. Every demon in the city will come attack them soon as they got found out as the El Search Party. Rena was boldly trying to approach Chloe to find out more information despite this risk.

Figuring out the reason for the demon invasion yesterday was a great accomplishment. It would be all over if Rena was found out but Rena was reliable enough to entrust this task with.

“It's not because of that.....”

“Then what is it?”

Eve asked as she took her hand off the window. She slightly looked around the surroundings then leaned on the windowsill.

“Let's take a break for a bit.”

Eve was a Nasod so she didn't have any concept of stamina. She didn't get tired no matter how much labor she did. Thus, her suggestion to take a break just now was out of consideration for Add.

Add realized this a moment later and his heart fluttered.

Certainly....Eve changed so much. Before the change, even if she knew that humans got tired she would have glossed it over by saying something like ‘humans are so inconvenient’~. But now, she changed to the point where she was the one suggesting that they should take a break.

Add also took his hands off the window and stood beside Eve. Other humans and demons passing by took slight glances at the two taking a break but no one said anything. They wouldn't get paid anyways if they didn't meet the work quota.... Also, demons most likely didn't care about glamorization of the outer castle. So you had to say this appeasement policy was actually intended for the Velder's citizens so they could still make a living.

'.....It was probably Elesis' idea.'

Add's brain thought restlessly even while his body was resting.

"Was there any problem during the last night's scouting? Ara told me nothing was wrong."

"....."

Add had forbidden Ara from talking about the incident last night with Karis and Elesis by saying he had his reasons. Add sighed after hearing Eve's questioning.

"There's something I'm troubled about."

"You can tell me."

"You don't even know what it is."

Eve's tone just now was as if she will certainly solve it for him if he told her. Eve must have read the meaning behind Add's questionable gaze so she added.

"Your troubles can be solved if everyone gathered their strengths. "

"Kukukuk.... It's not something like that."

Add shook his head. The reason he forbade Ara from talking about the event yesterday was.....Because it was way too strange when he thought about it again after a while.

How come Karis appeared in that exact moment?

It certainly didn't feel like she was taking a night stroll. She came to look for an intruder. Add could make couple of theories regarding this.

1. There is an alarm system that activates when someone approaches the overpass. Add would know about this if it was made from science. But he wouldn't know if it was magic.
2. There's someone in the El Search Party leaking information to the demons.

No.1 had the highest possibility. No.2....was a serious problem requiring attention if you thought about it objectively. There were already three members in this party that had their family member on the side of demons. It was obvious for Add to be extremely suspicious.

“.....I’m stupidly soft too.”

But he absolutely couldn’t believe that Ara, Elsword or Chung would betray them. There was also situational evidence that they couldn’t possibly have leaked information soon as Add went out last night to scout.... Still, Add couldn’t deny that his belief that there were no traitors was more based on his subjective opinion.

There is no way that there is a traitor in the El Search Party.

“I don’t think it’s a bad change.”

“What?”

Add got surprised and turned to look at Eve from what she said out of the blue. Eve spoke shortly while looking only forwards.

“You also changed a lot since when I first saw you back in Ruben.”

“.....What? What?”

Eve’s continued her words and Add didn’t know what to do because his heart started beating loudly. He couldn’t understand why Eve was suddenly saying this.

“H, how did I change?”

“That’s....”

Eve trailed her words then closed her mouth.

What evaluation did she have for him? Add suppressed his beating heart and waited for her to continue speaking.

Just like Add had observed Eve all this time and had become amazed at her changes.... Had Eve also been secretly observing Add as well?

“You’ve become more....”

“More?”

How did Eve think of him? He was curious.

“You’ve become more considerate about other people. Even just this morning, you repeatedly warned Rena to be careful.”

Add's face turned red and he couldn't figure out how to answer properly.

"T, that's because the entire mission will be over if that woman made a mistake! I can't have you guys ruin my perfect plan!"

"You also asked Chung to take good care of Ara."

"That's because that idiot is going to accidentally break some dishes for sure! It will all be over if she draws suspicion from that!"

Add was thankful that no one else was here looking at them. He raised his voice to his heart's content while thanking this fact. Eve listened to him silently then answered.

"Much as you've become more considerate about others, you've become less considerate about yourself."

"....."

"Humans can get hurt easily. So be careful."

To think Eve would say something like this? Eve added a reason as Add stared blankly.

"And you did actually get hurt the most."

"No, that was....."

Others had all died at least once. And Add knew of that future. That was why he tried his best to change that result even while disregarding his own safety.

But to Eve who didn't know about Add's circumstances..... it must have looked like he was throwing himself into danger without any hesitation for the sake of others.

"I don't know what you're troubled about. But if I can be of any help to you, you can talk to me any time, Add."

"....."

"I'll do my best for Elsword and the El Search Party."

Add couldn't figure out what to say so he just nodded silently. Then Eve started to silently clean the windows again as if this talk was over. It looked like she was slightly embarrassed.

But Add couldn't notice this because Eve's words were still ringing in his ears.

He was very close to accomplishing his goal of making Eve turn around to look at him. If he could just finish this Velder liberation mission perfectly....

After an ambiguous feeling, anticipation of the future to come and an excitement about his sweet accomplishment had passed. A new question was left behind in Add's mind.

By combining the worry Add had since last night and his 20 million failures, a new 3rd theory that wasn't detection by magic or betrayal from within the group came into his mind.

For Add who possessed the power to turn back time to fail so many times, you had to say there was a likely reason for it. Thus, either this was just like their problem with Elesis during their first battle in Velder where the enemy was so powerful that they couldn't win no matter how many times Add turned back time, or....

Just like how Add had Eun who could look ahead into the future, there was someone amongst the demons that had a similar power.

"Kukukuk."

It was a nonsensical theory. El Search Party would have been annihilated long ago if something like that existed.

Add stopped thinking and grabbed his cleaning rag. He didn't intend to let Eve work by herself because she was a Nasod that didn't tire.

There was a familiar guest waiting for her when Chloe returned to her office.

After seeing Rena sitting on a guest chair waving her hand, Chloe pressed her hand on her forehead and groaned.

"What....do you think you're doing crawling in here without permission like this?"

"But they guided me here when I told them I wanted to meet Chloe."

"....."

Chloe was at a loss for words as she glared at her subordinates standing nearby. Dark Elves were numbly staring at Rena then got surprised from Chloe's furious gaze and lowered their head.

"But general, I heard that she bathed together with you yesterday...."

"And she said she was a friend of general Chloe...."

No, why are they acting so embarrassed as if they were confessing to someone of opposite gender? When Chloe closed her mouth feeling dumbfounded, Dark Elves stared at Rena as if she was blindingly radiant. They all let out a silent cheer when Rena noticed their gazes and lightly waved her hand.

They were all befuddled looking at Rena. Isn't this a same reaction as fans meeting a popular opera singer?

"You're all...."

No, Rena was a girl(of course, they bathed together yesterday) and her subordinates were girls as well. So why did it turn into such a sticky atmosphere in here right now?

Of course, even to Chloe who was a Dark Elf, Rena was a very outstanding beauty. Chloe didn't think her own beauty was lacking (but didn't things like beauty not matter to warriors?), but Rena's beauty was to the point where she could easily be called a goddess.

It was honestly vexing but she was indeed pretty. Her beauty was unparalleled even amongst Elves.

"You idiots! Hurry up and return to your posts!"

"Aww....."

"Are you going to talk to such a pretty Elf by yourself general?"

When the front most subordinate let out a sullen voice, Chloe got angry and kicked her shin. Dark Elves realized that Chloe was angry and quickly left the room.

Chloe sighed and was about to sit down on a sofa but noticed the resentful gazes coming from her back. When Chloe angrily looked backwards, Dark Elves peeking inside the room through a slightly opened door got surprised and quickly closed the door.

".....such lack of discipline."

"Hmm, I'm fine with everyone talking together."

Rena smiled softly as she gracefully put down her teacup. It was annoying but she was indeed beautiful.

Feeling rebellious, Chloe frowned and put her legs on top of the table.

"Why did you come here? Didn't you come to this castle looking for work?"

"You don't need me for bathing assistant today?"

"....."

Chloe pressed her hand on her forehead again from what Rena said with an affectionate voice. She called this Elf here yesterday because she was curious about why an Elf had come to the outer castle looking for work..... She never would have guessed that she would be such a daring individual.

"Is there something wrong with your nerves? I thought Elves would loathe us Dark Elves for assisting the demons in their invasion."

“Ah, as I thought. You must regret invading.”

“.....”

What’s with her way of talking? When Chloe scowled at her, Rena nodded as if she was relieved.

“I’m glad.”

“.....What do you mean glad? Our talk should already be over.”

“Then shall we drink tea?”

Rena brought out a teacup from the drawer and put it in front of Chloe as if this office was her own room then started pouring tea into the cup. Rena’s actions were as if she knew where everything was already. Chloe was so dumbfounded by this that she snapped.

“Enough with the flattery. Don’t you have any pride? Elves wouldn’t normally act like this.”

“Hmm? Why do I need to care about pride when I’m having tea with my friend?”

“Friend?”

Did this Elf drink some lye up her nose while bathing yesterday? Chloe opened her eyes widely from befuddlement but Rena was just smiling beamingly.

Chloe covered her eyes with her hand then made an aching groan.

Chloe did indeed think this Elf was unique yesterday. But seriously, how can such an Elf exist? Weren’t Elves normally famous for being conceited and prideful? She couldn’t understand how there was an Elf with such affectionate social skills.

Well, this Elf was impudent enough to walk into Velder sealed off by a spatial barrier. You couldn’t expect her to act within reason.

“I’m telling you right now, I don’t have time to play around with you.”

“Then may I help you with your work?”

“.....What?”

Rena answered refreshingly when Chloe continued to stare at her as if she didn’t hear correctly.

“Since I entered Velder anyways, I can’t go out unless the spatial barrier is gone. So I’d like to help you.”

“.....Just what are you thinking? Do you think I’ll change my mind if you keep flattering me like this?”

Chloe recalled the talk they had while bathing yesterday then clenched her fists. Her goal was to change the El in Elrios into Dark El. She didn't intend to be swayed by this Elf's talk about coexistence and harmony.

"Hmm, of course I'd be thankful if you did."

Rena didn't hide that she had such intentions. She smiled gently as she looked at Chloe.

"Chloe called for me yesterday because you wanted to meet me right? I also came to visit Chloe today because I wanted to meet you."

"....."

"Isn't it a very rare opportunity..... for an Elf and a Dark Elf to sit face to face and talk like this?"

Chloe internally agreed as well. That was actually why she hadn't kicked Rena out despite her nonchalant approaches. If she really didn't want to see her, she would have driven her away soon as she saw her in her office.

"So you want me to let you help me with my work? Hmph, do you think you can handle it?"

"I heard that Dark Elves were in charge of keeping public order in Velder. I think I can also help with preventing the Glitter soldiers from oppressing the citizens."

".....Alright, but I have a condition."

Well, Chloe also had some interests about the Elves so it didn't matter if she complied with Rena's request. But she suddenly felt like being mean.

It irked her to see Rena coming into her office so leisurely as if it was nothing.

"You also have to wear the clothes of us Dark Elves just like my subordinates. That's the condition."

"Ah, is that all?"

"....."

Don't you have any pride? When Chloe got befuddled and blankly stared at her, Rena seemed to think for a moment then suggested.

"Umm, then can I wear the same clothes as the ones Chloe is wearing right now?"

"What?"

"I want us to wear matching clothes. Can I?"

".....It's not like you can't."

Chloe ended up answering like that for some reason when Rena asked seriously. Rena clapped and stood up with a happy expression.

“Then can you lend me some?”

“.....Uh, okay.”

As if mesmerized, Chloe stood up to approach the closet and took out a single set of clothes and handed it to Rena. Then Chloe got surprised and shouted when Rena started taking off her maid uniform without any hesitation.

“You idiot! Why are you taking them off here?!”

“But there’s only Chloe here.”

“.....”

Ah, that’s right. And not only that, they even bathed together yesterday. Chloe got confused at her own reaction but turned away when Rena continued to change as if nothing was wrong. For some reason, it felt like she shouldn’t watch Rena change.

“How can there be such a shameless Elf.....”

Overwhelming beauty that surpassed the Elf race and such friendly social skills... Chloe could understand why her subordinates were so mesmerized by her. As Chloe suppressed her complex thoughts and sighed, Rena spoke with a troubled voice from behind her.

“Umm, Chloe. I’m sorry but.....”

“What?”

“This one is too tight on the chest. Do you have a bigger one?”

“.....”

She’s such an incomprehensible Elf.



The day's work was over. Add changed into his original clothes and stood on the outer castle's balcony by himself while staring down at the Velder's streets. Velder city looked rather peaceful despite the demon occupation.

And he could see the Velder Liberation Army standing ready far away. They will come running to Velder outer castle soon as the El Search Party signalled them.

“.....This is not good.”

Today was day two. They almost had a complete understanding about the outer castle's structures. Amongst their enemies, ones that moved about often in the outer castle were Dark Elves and their general Chloe. Elesis seemed like she was staying on the 3rd floor but she never came down. Other generals weren't coming out from the inner castle.

Thus, they just needed to take care of Chloe and Elesis to capture the outer castle. But.....

“What to do....”

What were they going to do if Ran or other generals came out from the inner castle? There was too few information to formulate a plan. Just winging it to see how the future goes then turning back time was also a way..... But that wasn't too desirable.

Add didn't want to try so lightly as if he was rolling a dice. He needed to become more cautious since he failed so many times before.

“Are you troubled?”

Add looked back from hearing Rena's voice coming from behind him then became very surprised. Rena who wasn't wearing a maid uniform but instead wearing an outfit that revealed a lot of her belly and chest was approaching him.

“.....What's with that getup?”

“It's a gift from Chloe.”

“.....”

She improved her relationship with a demon general so much in just two days? As Add was being even more surprised by this, Rena stood on the balcony's ledge platform beside him as she bathed in the breeze. Wind blowing during twilight lightly shook Rena's long hair.

She was indeed beautiful no matter how many times you saw her. When Add continued to look with a feeling of staring at a beautiful painting, Rena brought up the topic first.

“I don't think Chloe is feeling too great either. It's mostly because her forces were greatly reduced by Aisha. Chloe being stationed in the outer castle also seems more like her getting kicked out from the inner castle.”

“.....and she told you all of this so easily?”

“She wasn’t too strong with alcohol. I won.”

“.....”

Add hadn’t realized it until now but there was an unusual sweet scent coming from Rena. Add was troubled about how to react when Rena suddenly stretched out her hand to pet his head.

“Our Add is a good boy.”

“.....What are you doing?”

Add realized this late and quickly pushed her arm away. But Rena smiled beamingly as she ruffled Add’s head with her other hand. Add couldn’t beat Rena in physical strength. She was also standing on the platform’s ledge so pushing her away might be dangerous.

Add gave up resisting and glared at Rena with a discontent gaze.

Rena petted Add as if she was soothing a grumpy cat then smiled vaguely.

“Aren’t you going to scold me about why I left drunk and defenceless Chloe alone?”

“.....You must have your own thoughts.”

Chloe was a general. Getting rid of her should make things much easier. But making use of Rena’s sociability that even improved her relationship with Chloe to the point where she got clothes as gifts and even hung out drinking together.....could be a good method as well.

But Add wasn’t too keen on it.

“And just getting rid of Chloe alone wouldn’t be enough. Our identities will be revealed once we start acting. So we have to finish everything in one go when we move.”

“Yes, thank you for believing in me.”

Rena smiled warmly after interpreting everything Add said as an excuse. She must not be a type that behaves too much while drunk. She only looked tired and sleepy.

“Chloe seemed regretful about all of this.... So....I’ll try my best to convince her.”

“.....”

“May I do that?”

Add clicked his tongue when Rena asked for his permission.

“Aren’t you going to do it anyways even if I said no?”

“I’d really like it if Add cheered me on.”

“Just be careful. Entire mission is over if you get found out.”

Rena nodded then suddenly hugged Add. Add got very surprised by this and tried to escape..... But embarrassingly, he wasn’t a match for her in strength.

Rena laughed when Add who had his face buried in her chest stopped struggling.

“Thank you for worrying about me.”

“.....Just quietly go to sleep if you’re drunk.”

Rena started humming as if she was soothing a cat in her arms.

She must really be drunk. Add sighed internally but didn’t resist anymore. Because there was no point in resisting.....and because it felt warm.

Old memories surfaced in his mind without him realizing it.

“Thank you for worrying about me. I’ll do my best.”

Rena must have been satisfied because she let go of Add then staggered. It wasn’t like Rena to show even a slight sign of weakness so Add added.

“Ask Eve to look after you if you are going to bathe.”

“Yes, alright. You should come down soon too Add.”

Rena left after saying this. When Add couldn’t hear her footsteps anymore, he sighed then looked up at the sky.

Setting sun was dying the sky with an ominous crimson color.

“.....There’s no good plan.”

But they might get found out if they spent too much time like this. Even if Chloe didn’t know the Search Party’s faces..... Everything will be over if they run into Elesis by accident.

“There’s no other way.”

He didn’t like it but he had to borrow that fox’s power.



Night came to the outer castle. 30 minutes before the lights off signal where workers were forbidden to move around the castle, Add brought out Eun and stood on the 2nd floor's balcony.

Eun giggled as she looked up at the night sky.

“For boy to request a secret meeting with me at night like this, so a day like this can come too.”

“.....”

When Add continued to glare at her without an answer, Eun sulked then sighed.

“Aren't you going to tell me to stop saying things that doesn't make sense?”

“.....Didn't you already know that I'll call you out at this point?”

“Haaah.....”

Eun seemed to make a bitter sigh then suddenly kicked Add's shin. Add staggered and backed out from the sudden ambush.

Add refused to yield and didn't make any sound despite getting hit. It still hurt as if his leg was going to fall off.

“Boy, didn't I already tell you many times that I'm not all powerful or all knowing? You call a girl out at night to make her heart pound then all you talk about is a suspicion that's been already resolved long ago?”

“You... shouldn't be in a position to act so confidently in front of me right now.”

Add continued to glare at Eun. As expected from a fox, how can she be so shameless?

If Eun had been purposely withholding information from Add, then shouldn't she at least be sorry or feel guilt from it?

“Then what do you want from me? Because I was hiding information from boy, because I know all the days that boy cannot remember.....Did you wish for me to feel some kind of guilt about it?”

“So shameless.....”

“Then what does boy want? Do you want me to bow my head and apologize right now?”

Add closed his mouth when Eun snapped in anger. She looked like she was really angry.....and he also didn't know how to answer when she acted like she did nothing wrong.

“Should I apologize while bursting out in tears? Will you trust me if I do that?”

“At least.....”

“At least what? I should at least be feeling sorry? So there’s even a time when boy talks about ethics and righteousness to me.”

Eun’s red eyes had a dangerous gleam. Add realized that she was seriously angry and unconsciously prepared a defense formula on his Dynamos. Two of them hadn’t clashed so far, but Eun was more powerful than Ara.

She could possibly be the strongest amongst this party.

“Phew....”

Thankfully, Eun must have calmed down because she closed her eyes then sighed.

“Boy must be thinking about countless things right now. About my true motives or if I’m plotting something. I fully understand you suspecting me. I experienced situations like this many times somewhere else.....and this isn’t the first time I heard about this from boy after all.”

“.....”

“But I can’t help but to get angry every time I hear it. Please understand.”

Eun sighed then stretched out her hand. It was a gesture for reconciliation. But Add didn’t grab it and asked Eun straightly.

“Stop trying to slither your way out of this again.”

“.....What do you mean?”

“You still haven’t told me why you kept this information hidden from me. You’re trying to slyly change the topic. Don’t try to bury my question by suddenly throwing a fit of anger.”

“.....”

Eun’s face seemed to stiffen from Add’s questioning then she made a low chuckle.

Sound of fox’s laughter flew across the night air.

“Boy is really smart. Amazing, really amazing.”

“It’s because your tricks are bad. Anyways.....”

Add shook his head and organized his thoughts. The negotiation starts here.

“You probably won’t tell me anyways if I asked why you hid it from me. You did say from the start that you didn’t intend to tell me all the information.”

“Yes, I did.”

Eun smiled satisfyingly as if she was proud of Add for seeing through her trick.

Eun had already drawn the line that she wouldn't reveal all the information back when Add asked for Eun's help in defeating the Shadow Master in Elder.

According to that bargain, it wasn't like this issue was unacceptable.

"But there must be a reason why you told me now. It's not like I trust you completely..... But I'll trust whatever you say regarding this situation."

"Even if those words mean the same, can't you say them more nicely?"

"Tell me how I can solve this situation. You should know how. The way for us to achieve our goal in this Velder royal castle crawling with demon generals."

"Huhmm....."

Eun hummed then narrowed her eyes. Her red eyes had a whimsical gleam.

"Boy should already know the way and yet is asking me. Why are you asking me?"

"I thought about it all this time. But even if we can somehow take the outer castle.... What comes next is the problem. We are already unsure if we can defeat just Elesis alone.....But there's even Chloe here. And there's no hope if other generals come to help."

"Boy should already know about 'look one way and row another' and about feint tactics."

He obviously knew those. Draw attention from one side while accomplishing their goals from the other side. But attempting such a thing in this Velder royal castle full of demon generals will.....

"Boy has a face as if you don't want to say it yourself. Tch, I'll say it for you instead."

Eun withdrew her smile then spoke coldly.

"Give up on the others."

"....."

"Root of boy's problem is because boy is trying to achieve his goal while holding on to everything and not giving up on anything. It's now the time to throw them away."

"Rejected."

Add drew the line but Eun shook her head. She leaned her back on the balcony and smiled voluptuously.

"Boy is trying to keep all of the other members alive. That's why there's a waste of effort. Can't you just abandon everyone except Ara to turn back time if necessary and Eve which is boy's goal?"

“.....Don’t make me laugh. Why do you think I turned back time over and over again?”

Add spoke angrily but Eun mocked.

“So you can throw them away here.”

“.....”

“In order to use them as expendables in this fight.”

Add clenched his fists at Eun’s words.

The reason Eun let Add rewind time to save people other than Eve, to save Elsword and Rena was for this?

To use them as fodders in an actually difficult battle?

.....If you just considered the effectiveness, Eun’s policy was correct!

“Alright, what will you do boy? I’ve watched boy’s failures all this time. I also know that boy is determined to create a different result. That’s why I’m suggesting a way.”

“.....”

“Use other members as expendables. Isn’t everything okay long as boy can just achieve his goal?”

Add bit his lips. Eun’s words were.....way too sweet. The reason Add couldn’t find a solution in the first place was because he wasn’t trying to let anyone in the El Search Party die.

But things became much easier if he threw this away.

Throw Rena to Chloe, let Chung take care of Helpu....and such. Add can break through this situation easily like this.

“My goal is.....”

“Don’t get confused. Boy’s goal is not in this time, it’s in the past. Wasn’t it boy’s desire to go back to the past and meet with your precious person?”

Add didn’t remember telling Eun this..... But he must have told her in one of those times. Add tightly clenched his fists from Eun’s words then sighed.

“How did me from last time fail?”

“Even four days straight wouldn’t be enough for that story.”

It meant that she wasn’t going to talk about it. Eun’s temptation was.....indeed alluring.

It did seem cruel, but Add's policy of not letting anyone die in this battle against so many mighty foes was absurd. Their fight against Ran had been dangerously close as well. They could only turn things around because Ara awakened to Memory of Time and Space.

Search Party members could barely hold their own against even one of the demon generals. Keeping everyone alive in this battle against multiple demon generals was honestly impossible.

Battle that ends with everyone safe and sound. This was a goal Add could set because he could rewind time. But it had now reached its limit.

"El Search Party is a group that should have been annihilated long ago. But boy rewound time and forcefully maintained it all this time. Am I right?"

"....."

"The time has now come to give up and let go. No, it would be more correct to say that you endured through all the events so far for this moment alone."

Add opened the fists he had been holding on tightly. Then as if representing its master's feelings, Dynamo discharged an electric current that tore apart the night air.

Pzzzzt!

"I refuse."

"I don't think it's that bad of a suggestion."

"If I was going to follow your suggestion..... I would have followed the first one instead."

The first suggestion, Eun's temptation was to turn back time again and again to obtain the present where he successfully stole Eve's core.

But Add refused that suggestion.

"I did things my way all this time. I don't intend to withdraw my methods now."

"That's a troublesome stubbornness. Aren't you curious about.....why you failed all this time?"

"I'll find another way."

Add couldn't accept this suggestion even if the reason for his more than 20 million failures was because he had refused Eun's temptation.

Time travel was a very powerful ability. There should have been nothing that Add couldn't have done if he set his mind to it. He could have already stole Eve's core many times over. But Add didn't do that.

He won't let this end in a way that he couldn't accept. Because Add had infinite amount of time.....he wanted a result he could accept, using the method that he invested his time in so far.

"I'm almost there....."

"....."

Eun sighed then waved her hand.

"Boy really does as he pleases. You denying my thoughtful suggestion is making me not want to cooperate with you anymore."

"If you were going to change your mind just because I refused this suggestion..... I wouldn't have failed so many times."

".....You're way too smart."

Eun clicked her tongue as if she wasn't too keen about Add's answer. What Add meant was that he wouldn't be standing in this place right now if his failure from before had occurred because he refused Eun's suggestion and Eun stopped cooperating because she got annoyed by this.

It was a complicated story..... But to summarize simply, Eun must have helped Add rewind time countless times in the past.

She would have stopped cooperating long ago if she was going to change her mind from something like this.

"I'm not fond of you.....But there's no choice but to trust you right now."

"Even if they are the same words, can't you say them more nicely?"

No matter what happened, no matter what the result was, Eun hadn't stopped aiding Add. Although Add couldn't remember, the reason why he could challenge this fight again was because Eun had helped him all this time.

"So.....we'll break through with a different method."

"How exactly? I'm telling you right now, I don't have any other methods in mind."

"Tell me all of the possible futures you see. We'll formulate a plan based on those."

"Just like how you avoided running into Karis thanks to Ara?"

Add nodded when the event from last night was mentioned. Just when Eun frowned as if she was really displeased, footsteps approached from behind.

"Big Brother Add, you were talking with Big Sister Ara here?"

It was Elsword, he was drenched in sweat for some reason.

Add stared blankly at Elsword. Then Eun narrowed her eyes then suddenly made a bright smile.

“Oh my, Mr.Elsword. Why do you look so fatigued this late at night?”

“My body was aching so I trained for a bit. I did it in a way so I wouldn’t get found out so don’t worry.”

“Ah, I see. You’re more thoughtful than you look Mr.Elsword.”

“.....”

Add got dumbfounded and glared at Eun. He didn’t know what she was planning but it was blatantly obvious that she was imitating Ara. Only the tone of her words was polite, its content was insult.

But Elsword didn’t care too much and looked up at Add.

“I wanted to talk to you. Should I come later?”

“Mr.Add and I were talking about something important.”

“Just talk to me now.”

Eun gave a pretty wink but Add ignored her. He didn’t know what joke she was pulling but he didn’t intend to play along with her.

“.....Oh okay. Then let’s talk again later Mr.Add.”

Eun disguised as Ara spoke in a very sad tone then walked away while sulking. Elsword saw Eun walk away then cautiously stole a look at Add.

Although, his gaze was so obvious that look annoyed Add even more.

“Umm..... Aren’t you treating Big Sister Ara too coldly?”

“Can’t you see those tails?”

“That’s Big Sister Ara’s ability right?”

It became bothersome to explain so Add waved his hand.

“Just say what you came here to say. Go to the others if it’s idle chatter.”

“Let me fight Big Sister.”

“We’ll have to fight her anyways. It won’t be long so just wait.”

Elsword shook his head heavily then looked straightly at Add and requested.

“Let me fight Big Sister 1 on 1.”

“.....Are you crazy?”

Don't all of the El Search Party members know how powerful Elesis is? Even though everyone had fought together before, they could barely manage to bring out Elesis' 2nd form.

Letting Elsword handle Elesis by himself was basically telling him to go die.

Did this guy listen in on Eun's suggestion? Add got troubled and quickly ran his brain but Elsword looked serious.

“I'm also asking this after much thought.”

“Drop the nonsense. Do I really have to say this out loud? You're no match for Elesis. Why don't you jump off here right now if you want to commit suicide?”

“But I'll be fine even if I jump off from here.”

“.....”

This place was high for a 2nd floor but Elsword with his great physical abilities should probably be alright. Add frowned from not being able to retort back.

“Enough with the nonsense. I don't know what's gotten into you. But you won't even last 5 seconds if you fought by yourself.”

“I know very well that I'm no match for Big Sister right now.”

“.....Then why are you saying such things? If you're going to commit suicide, go do it in a place where I can't see.”

Add's insides were boiling and was about to explode. Here he was rewinding time with a goal of everyone's survival in mind. He couldn't help but to get enraged when a member that had the least skill was now saying he was going to throw away his life.

It was like watching a youngest sibling you raised up preciously all this time messing about acting all grown up.

“But I have to be the one to fight her. I know Big Sister's sword the best. Also.....”

No matter what words came next, Add was planning to snort and refuse. Annoyance that got built up during his argument with Eun was about to explode.

“.....I want to become stronger.”

“.....”

Add winced. Elsword spoke strongly while looking down at his feet.

“Just like you said, I know I’m weak. That’s why I want to become stronger.”

“That’s.....”

“Eve and Big Sister Ara both became very strong after awakening that El. I....want to do that too.”

Add couldn’t answer right away because of the emotions contained in Elsword’s voice. Elsword’s voice filled with desire and hope was ever so desperate.

“Eve and Big Sister Ara both awakened that El while fighting. So I want to try while fighting Big Sister.”

“It’s a crazy thing to try.....”

Add groaned after realizing what Elsword was thinking. Elsword’s words did make sense but his enemy was none other than Elesis. She was the most powerful enemy that they knew of in Velder.

“I also know it’s going to be dangerous. But I have to do this now. We’ll have to do it anyways.”

“.....”

“Big Sister Ara and Eve also became stronger. I want to become stronger quickly.....and be of help in winning this fight.”

Add’s pupils shook when Elsword stared at him with a heated determination.

It was certain that one could become stronger if they awakened to the Memory of Time and Space. Success rate of their mission will rise significantly if Elsword could step forth into the next stage.

“No.”

“Big Brother!”

“One who comes up with our plan is me. I cannot allow something that reckless. I cannot bet everyone’s fates on your gamble.”

Elsword winced from Add’s words. Elsword would have protested if he reprimanded normally, but bringing up how the others could be in danger was more effective.

“Don’t try to venture dangerously just from a vague possibility. I’ll come up with a plan for the perfect victory for sure. So you just stand by stupidly like you always do.”

“.....”

“We’ll win. Believe in that.”

When Add spoke forcefully, Elsword hesitated for a moment then answered.

“Yes, Big Brother Add is smart after all.....”

“I can smell the sweat even from here. Go wash before you sleep.”

Add spoke. Elsword nodded as he slowly walked away. Add bit his lower lips while hearing the footsteps go downstairs.

He just refused but Elsword’s suggestion was enticing. There was no particular solution right now so following Elsword’s bold suggestion and betting on the chance of him awakening the Memory of Time and Space was a method as well. He can just turn back time if it fails.....

“No, I can’t.”

Add chased away the sweet temptation.

He couldn’t bet their fates on a game of chance. Even though Add could turn back time to start over again, that didn’t make him all powerful.

You can never break a boulder with an egg no matter how many times you turned back time. The El Search Party lost against Elesis despite having the power to ridicule time.

And Add failed for more than 20 million times.

“.....I’m an engineer.”

He’ll carry things out with a plan based on numbers and logic. He will not put his hopes on something vague like emotions or awakening. Add clenched his fists tightly and pulled his mind together.

Time was still flowing, but he had to figure out a way to win somehow.

He must.

“.....ugh, my head.”

Chloe opened her eyes in her bedroom. She frowned when her head started hurting as if it was about to shatter.

Then a teacup was put down near her head.

“Here, drink this.”

“Ugh.....”

Chloe grabbed her dizzy head as she instinctively took the teacup to her mouth and started to drink. Just warm enough honey tea moistened her throat and started to bring her to her senses.

“That’s why you shouldn’t have mixed those drinks.”

“.....Yes.”

Who was this subordinate? Why was she nagging so much? Chloe took the teacup off her mouth to scold whoever it was but her eyes opened widely from surprise.

“W, why are you here?!”

Rena in a maid uniform smiled brightly at her.

“You were sleeping in for too long so I came to wake you up. How are you feeling? Do you feel better now?”

“.....”

What was her subordinates doing letting this daring Elf infiltrate all the way into the general’s bedroom? But an answer instantly rose up in Chloe’s head.

They must have let her pass with their jaws wide open.

“Uuugh.....”

“Is somewhere other than your head hurting??”

“.....”

How could they let this Elf all the way into her bedroom? What if she was an assassin? Chloe was deciding to reprimand her subordinates strictly....then at the same time realized that it was a hypocritical idea.

She was the one who got knocked out while drinking with this Elf yesterday after all.

This Elf was so friendly to the point where they could have a drink together when it hadn’t even been 3 days since they’ve met. Even Chloe who used to scoff at Elves for being a self-conceited race was.....already not caring about her skin color anymore.

There would have been plenty enough times where Chloe’s life would have been danger if this Elf had some sinister motives. Chloe knew this but she surprisingly started opening up to this Elf at some point.

This Elf was extremely talented at getting people to let their guard down.

“I’m going to go crazy....”

“Are you hurting somewhere?”

“It’s nothing. Just get ready to head out for work.”

“Okay, but shouldn’t you get dressed first?”

Chloe got surprised from realizing that she was naked right now. She quickly grabbed the bed sheet to cover herself. Rena chuckled lightly then sat down on the middle of the bed.

“You said you had to go to the commercial area this afternoon right? Let’s go together.”

“Just....what do you want from me?”

Chloe asked sharply while still covered in bed sheet. Rena was still just smiling.

“I don’t think you approached me because you wanted money or power. Then what do you want? Why are you acting so openly?”

“Do you have to want something to become friends?”

“Because I can’t trust you.”

Chloe spoke sharply then carefully grabbed her dagger from inside the bed sheet. Even though she slept naked, she always had her weapon nearby her.

It’s already been couple days since Chloe started hanging out with this unnamed elf. She was amazed by her surprising sociability but couldn’t help but to get suspicious at the same time.

“Hmm, is that so? Then I’d like Chloe and the Dark Elves to stop cooperating with the Demons.”

“.....What?”

“I’d like you to become a bridge between Elrios and the Demon Realm. Would this kind of plot be acceptable for you?”

“You’re insane, I’ll instantly....”

Chloe was speaking threateningly but her words stopped when Rena stared at her sadly.

“You’re going to offer my head to the demons?”

“.....You think I can’t?”

Even though they hung out last night drinking together, they could become enemies today. That was the kind of place battlefield was.

Not only that, her target was an Elf, a detestable race. All she did was open up to her for a bit accidentally.

“You probably could. But I’d like it if you didn’t.”

“Hah, finally you’re afraid for your life. Then....”

“I’d like it if you stopped acting so cowardly. Chloe.”

“.....”

Anger suddenly rose up in Chloe and she jumped forwards. Her dagger fiercely cut across the air.....and stopped right in front of Rena’s neck.

Blood coming from a slight cut dripped down along the blue dagger.

Despite this, Rena was still calmly looking at Chloe. She didn’t beg for her life even with the dagger in front of her neck.

“I’m cowardly? How dare you!”

“I wouldn’t have come to Velder if I was afraid for my life.”

“.....”

Well, there’s no way that an Elf who walked into a city occupied with demons, moreover a city that you can’t leave once you enter would be sane.

Chloe internally became astonished at this Elf’s nerves but still didn’t withdraw her dagger.

“I’d like both Elves and Dark Elves to not forget each other’s duties. Invading Elrios isn’t what Dark Elves should be doing right? Your people’s pride was to protect the Dark El and the Demon Realm’s sacred site. Have you even forgotten that?”

“How could I? I won’t forgive you if you run your mouth one more time, Elf!”

“Chloe.”

After getting her name called, Chloe realized that she will never find out this Elf’s name if she swung her dagger now.

And this unnamed Elf spoke kindly without withdrawing her smile despite being in danger of losing her head at any moment.

“We can end this pointless war if you who know about the Demon Realm’s circumstances and I who know about Elrios’ circumstances talked with one another.”

“.....Stop with the nonsense. I said from the start I had no intention of doing that.”

“You never wanted to invade Elrios right?”

Rena slowly got up from her seat. She stood up while the tip of the dagger was pressing on her neck so Chloe got surprised and unknowingly pulled back the dagger.

“We never wanted to fight each other. I think it’s time to stop now.”

“...Nonsense, who would accept peace now? We are already at war. Only thing left now is either destruction of the Demon Realm or Elrios!”

“You made a mistake.”

Rena spoke calmly and kindly as if lecturing a child.

“It’s bad to not admit your mistake and continue to be stubborn.”

“Don’t make me laugh. Who made a mistake? Then should we have just sat there and watch the Dark El weaken?”

“You should have told us first. You should have asked us if we could help.”

“How can we trust your people? Is there any guarantee that you wouldn’t invade the Demon Realm using this chance?”

Rena spoke without a single hint of hesitation.

“Because we’re same Elves.”

“....What?”

“I would have believed Chloe if you asked. Just like Chloe believed what I said.”

Her words were unreasonable....but Chloe couldn’t think of words to refute for a moment. This Elf’s words were not logical in the slightest, and yet she was so friendly that Chloe ended up admitting what she said.

Trying to refute this Elf from the start didn’t make sense.

Rena slowly held out her hand when Chloe’s pupils shook. But Chloe had been deep in thought so she instinctively swung her arm from surprise.

Slash.

Dagger cut across Rena’s hand with a chilling sound. Rena painfully groaned from the wound on her hand but she still smiled.

“It’s okay. Let’s talk about this together.”

“.....You’re crazy.”

Chloe looked at the white hand dripping red blood then spoke with a tired voice as she sighed. Her head was so complicated that it didn’t have any room for thoughts anymore. She completely surrendered.

She couldn’t handle this Elf at all.

“.....Alright, talk away. I’ll at least listen to what you have to say.”

“Yes, thank you.”

Chloe turned her head away when Rena smiled brightly.

“But before doing that, stay still. We have to stop the bleeding.”

“Umm, shouldn’t you wear clothes before that?”

“.....”

Chloe had been naked ever since she jumped out of the bed sheet. She felt embarrassed in many ways.

After Chloe got dressed and they stopped Rena’s hand from bleeding, the two of them sat on the bed facing each other. There wasn’t an appropriate place for both of them to sit face to face because this was a bedroom.

“This place will be fine. No one will hear us.”

Chloe spoke haughtily after explaining why she insisted they talked in her bedroom.

“So what exactly is your plan? How will you bring about peace between Elrios and the Demon Realm?”

“I plan to talk to them just like we’re doing now.”

“Even having multiple lives wouldn’t be enough for that. It might have worked on me. But you won’t be able to convince Ran and Karis with just that. They’ll try to cut you down right away.”

“Then we’ll have to fight to make them listen.”

Chloe narrowed her eyes at Rena’s bold words.

Rena’s tone was as if she wasn’t afraid of the demon generals in the slightest... this Elf wasn’t normal.

“.....You, are you an El Search Party?”

“Hmm? You didn’t know?”

“.....”

Rena tilted her head. Chloe let out multitude of curses internally. She had heard that there was an Elf amongst the El Search Party But for that Elf to have already infiltrated the Velder outer castle so boldly like this....?

No, not just that. She even approached Chloe and tried to convince her.

Chloe couldn’t speak because it felt like her jaw was going to fall off. She couldn’t tell if the headache she was getting right now was because of the hangover or because of this Elf in front of her right now.

“I thought you knew.”

No, it must be because of both. Chloe pressed on her aching forehead then sighed painfully.

Seriously, she’s going to go crazy.

“Crazy, you’re crazy. If this gets found out....”

“Don’t worry too much.”

“.....Can’t you hear me saying you’re crazy?”

Chloe made a half tearful face as she scowled at Rena. The El Search Party were individuals classified as highly dangerous for the demons. It won’t be easy for Chloe to avoid suspicion since she was hanging around with one of them.

Dark Elves lived in the Demon Realm but they weren’t technically demons..... Their position in the Demon Realm was vague.

The reason Chloe was able to reach a position of a general despite her race’s position in the Demon Realm was because of her outstanding skills and because she worked extremely hard towards political standing of the Dark Elves.

But all that effort was in danger of collapsing. Was this how it felt to see the sky fall?

“Haaah, Seriously.....”

“There won’t be a problem if we do it together.”

As Chloe was half in tears not being able to do anything, Rena grabbed Chloe’s hand and gently soothed her. The phrase carry fire in one hand and water in the other should be appropriate here.

Rena made a bright smile when Chloe looked reproachfully at her. Chloe couldn't bring herself to protest.....after seeing an Elf so beautiful like a goddess telling her everything will be okay while smiling.

“You.... you're really crazy. If this gets found out, not only you but me and the other Dark Elves won't get off safely. Our position hadn't been good already ever since we were defeated by that magician.”

“Yes, I heard about that while drinking yesterday.”

“.....”

She must have spoke about all the things she shouldn't have while she was drunk. Chloe blamed herself from yesterday as she let out a heavy sigh then dropped backwards to lie down.

“You're crazy. I don't care. Do whatever you want by yourself.”

“Chloe has to help too.”

Rena lied down beside Chloe as if it was something trivial then grabbed her hand. Chloe glared for a bit but stopped.

“.....Why do you trust me so much? Is it just because we're Elf and a Dark Elf?”

“Chloe isn't trying to reveal who I am to the demons despite knowing the truth right?”

“.....”

Well that's true. It felt surreal.....but they were already on the same boat. Chloe's feelings right now were divided between half feeling that she won't be able to avoid suspicion because she hung out couple days with an El Search Party member and half feeling that she wanted to trust this Elf.

Chloe sighed after examining her own thoughts.

“I don't know. I have to think about what's best for the Dark Elves in the end. Since things ended up like this, I'll cooperate with you to the point where no harm comes to the Dark Evles.... But I'll abandon you right away if the Dark Elves' position becomes endangered.”

“Yes, that's plenty enough.”

Rena gave a satisfied smile as she petted Chloe's head. Chloe suddenly felt frustrated and pushed Rena away with her feet. But Rena blocked Chloe's feet with her other hand then continued to pet her.

Why you....

A soundless battle started on top of the bed. It was a fight with arms and legs dizzily colliding and pushing each other. Both of them were not backing out. It was a simple quarrel, but the level of physical ability involved in it wasn't normal.

"Huff, huff...."

"Phew...."

Chloe and Rena both stopped playing around as they caught their breaths. It started as a light joke, but they both felt that it will turn into a real fight if they continued.

And it was also because Chloe recalled that Rena hurt her hand.

"You're tiring me out from the morning."

"It broke some sweat right? Let's go take a bath."

As Chloe was sighing, Rena stood up to grab Chloe's arm to pull her up.

Chloe sighed while being forced to stand up.

"Why are you so diligent? Didn't you already complete your goal?"

"Hmm? But we should wash if we want to go out to work this afternoon."

"Huh?"

"Weren't we going to patrol the commercial area together?"

Chloe stared dumbfounded but Rena was tilting her head to ask if something was wrong. When Chloe didn't move, Rena smiled then pulled Chloe's hand to drag her.

"We have to sober up a bit after all. Let's go bathe together."

".....Ah, haha."

Chloe unknowingly laughed as she got dragged by Rena's hand. Thinking that this insane Elf's goal was obviously to convince Chloe and to steal information must have been just her preconception.

No matter how Chloe saw it, it was both. Even if Chloe didn't get convinced, this Elf wouldn't have minded and continued acting like this anyways.

Chloe spoke quietly to herself so that this Elf grabbing her hand and walking in front of her wouldn't hear.

".....Elves aren't bad either."

She didn't have to ask to know that.....this Elf had approached her sincerely.

Not that she particularly wanted her to.

3. To Overcome Fate

Their 3rd night in the Velder outer castle. El Search Party sat around tightly in a circle inside their bedroom. They were all impressed by what Rena told them.

She actually managed to convince the enemy general Chloe. It was an unbelievable story.

“That’s magnificent.”

“Amazing!”

“Then we won’t have to fight the Dark Elves.”

Add who was listening while leaning on the wall frowned.

“How can we trust Chloe’s words?”

“Because we’re still here talking together.”

Add agreed to what Rena said in response. This place was enemy territory. Chloe shouldn’t need to use tricks. All Chloe had to do was bring all of the demon forces down on the Search Party.

“This is a good opportunity. What are we going to do Big Brother Add?”

“.....We’ll get help from Chloe and the Dark Elves and attack Elesis right away.”

If Chloe became their ally, then the outer castle was basically within the El Search Party’s grasp.

Only one remaining was Elesis staying on the 3rd floor.

“Are you sure? We weren’t originally planning to fight Big Sister. You don’t have to worry about me.”

“Idiot. This isn’t because of you. We cannot carry this out with Elesis behind us.”

This wasn’t over with just capturing the outer castle. They had to go to the inner castle and stop the process of royal castle’s El turning into a Dark El.

“Even Elesis isn’t invincible. We can defeat her if us, Chloe and the Dark Elves attack her all at once. Rena, contact the Velder Liberation Army that we’ll start the plan tomorrow night.”

“Yes, got it.”

While they couldn’t move in or out freely because of the spatial barrier, it was planned beforehand for the Velder Liberation Army to come running if the El Search Party signaled with a torch from the empty house that they chose as their hideout.

But no one could leave once they entered.

“Tomorrow will be the only chance we’ll get. So everyone should make sure to prepare properly.”

“But do we really have to carry out the plan during the night?”

Add looked back because he couldn’t understand what Elsword meant by his question.

“Everyone won’t be able to see well during the night. But demons won’t be affected much by this. We’ll be at a disadvantage if we fight during the night.”

“.....Then let’s make it afternoon of the day after tomorrow.”

It was a sensible opinion despite coming from Elsword. They had to make various preparations so starting tomorrow afternoon would be difficult anyways.

“Everyone listen up. We’ll start the plan on afternoon of the day after tomorrow, 3 o’clock. Everything will be over if our identities get found out before then. So continue to work without drawing suspicion. Rena, make sure Chloe doesn’t accidentally leak information either. Tell her to not say anything even to her subordinates until the plan execution date.”

“I already told her before coming here.”

“Alright..... Then everyone prepare yourselves. This will be our final fight against the demons and it will be that much more dangerous.”

El Search Party members all answered to Add without hesitation.

“No problem!”

“I’ll give it my best too.”

“I’m ready.”

“I’ll do my best!”

“I’ll also help all of you the best I can.”

Add clenched his fists tightly after hearing everyone’s agreements. His head heated up no matter how much he tried to think rationally.

Finally, it was time for their final showdown with the demons.

He’ll succeed for sure this time.

Two days later, mission start time.

Rena headed to the rendezvous point located in landing of the stairway heading to the 3rd floor. There were mainly two stairways that went up to the 3rd floor. Rena and Chloe's rendezvous point was on the left side stairway.

Rena walked up the stairs, Chloe who was waiting at the landing turned around to look at her.

".....You're late."

"I had something to prepare."

After giving a glance at the bow in Rena's hand, Chloe looked back at the Dark Elves around her. Over 20 Dark Elves nodded from Chloe's gaze and drew their weapons.

"So I cooperate with you to take down Elesis on the 3rd floor..... Then we create equilibrium in the castle by bringing in the Velder Liberation Army to capture the outer castle. Then try negotiating with the other generals inside the inner castle?"

"Yes, let's give it our best."

"But where are the other Search Party members? I thought there were many of you."

"Umm, that's....."

Rena seemed to sigh then suddenly jumped down. Everyone got confused and just stood blinking when Rena ran away to the bottom floor in middle of her words.

But only Chloe wasn't confused and asked coldly instead.

".....Why are you running away in middle of talking?"

"I'm sorry, Chloe. But I don't plan on getting captured here."

"....."

Chloe maintained silence for a while then asked because she was honestly curious.

"How did you know?"

"There's no way Chloe wouldn't know that other kids are inside the outer castle together with me. You would have obviously researched this beforehand. So there's no reason for you to ask about them as if it's the first time you've heard about them."

".....Just from that intuition?"

Elf who was always smiling and acting friendly sensed danger from just a single word then became suspicious about others? Of course, what Rena was saying was correct but Chloe couldn't understand where she had made an error.

"It's not an intuition. Chloe doesn't speak that way. You should have gotten angry and asked why I didn't come with the others. You wouldn't have said something that sounded so made up."

"....."

What a surprising observation skills. Chloe clicked her tongue shortly.

"I'll take it upon myself and spare your life if you surrender."

"Why did you suddenly change your mind?"

"I didn't change my mind. This is the correct action to take as a demon."

At Chloe's declaration, the other Dark Elves each drew their daggers and bows. Rena stared up at Chloe sadly then nodded.

"I see. So we'll have to fight."

"Attack."

Dark Elves charged at Rena with their weapons drawn soon as Chloe gave her order.

Right side stairway leading to the 3rd floor.

Elsword, Eve, Ara, Chung and Add were standing ready on the stair landing.

"Will Big Sister Rena be alright?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know."

The core of this plan was to join up with Chloe then attack Elesis. But Add couldn't trust Chloe in the end and only sent Rena.

Ara must have been feeling restless because she was repeatedly grasping then letting go of her spear. Then her eyes suddenly widened.

"I hear fighting!"

".....So things didn't go well."

"Let's quickly go help Rena."

"I don't think it will be so easy....."

Soon as Add said this, Glitter soldiers started to gather at the bottom floor. Of course, even Add by himself could take care of them easily..... But if Chloe had betrayed them, then it meant that their covers were already blown.

The other members were staring at Add even though enemies just appeared. It meant they were waiting for his instructions. Add realized that this attempt was a failure.

He had to retry from the start.

“Ara, call Eun out.”

“She’s telling me to tell you that it’s not time yet.”

What’s that fox saying? But thinking about it again, the one who fell into the trap was none other than Rena. Not only that, Add had already cautioned Rena that Chloe might change her mind in the last moment.

Rena definitely wouldn’t go down so easily.

“Why aren’t they attacking us?”

Glitter soldiers were only gathering below them. They were displaying hostility towards the party but didn’t come to attack them. They weren’t behaving like this because they were afraid. Rather, they were ordered to wall the party off.

“We’ll have to move up anyways. Let’s use the 3rd floor’s hallway to head to where Rena is.”

The party followed Add’s instructions and moved up the stairs while being wary of the Glitter soldiers’ movements. Glitter soldiers that already numbered over 100 slowly followed the group up to the 3rd floor. Add carefully examined their behavior and bit his lips.

Something didn’t feel right. It felt like they’ve become a rabbit being chased into a corner.

“Just who could have come up with this kind of trap.....?”

He should first suspect Chloe who changed her mind. But this felt a bit different. Demons so far had been just recklessly charging at them. They had never shown this kind of behavior of trying to control where the party went.

And on the third floor.....

“It’s too late now.”

Familiar voice he’d never forget. Add got shocked from this cold voice and looked in front of him. Red hair was waving from the breeze coming in through the open window.

Elesis was waiting for them in the middle of the 3rd floor’s hallway.

“.....Big Sister.”

Elsword spoke in a low voice as he drew his sword. Other members also couldn't hide their tension as they raised their weapons.

Behind them were continuously gathering Glitter soldiers, and Elesis was in front.

“Ara and I will open a path. Add, you go ahead and help Rena out.”

“.....You and Ara alone are definitely no match for Elesis.”

Even though Eve and Ara had awakened their Memory of Time and Space, the group still couldn't even grasp the full extent of Elesis' power. Add drew the line but Chung spoke this time.

“I'll help as well. Go on ahead Mr.Add.”

“Don't make me.....”

“Everyone go ahead. I'll face Big Sister by myself.”

Add got annoyed and was about to answer but Elsword butted in. Eve winced then spoke coldly.

“Not by yourself.”

“That's right, Mr.Elsword. It's too dangerous for you to fight Ms.Elesis by yourself.”

“But I still have to do this.”

Elsword took a deep breath then spoke.

“Everyone, please. I want to fight Big Sister.....with everything I got.”

“Are you saying we're in the way?”

Add got dumbfounded and asked but Elsword shook his head.

“I don't know. But.....I think I have to be the one to settle things with Big Sister.”

It was a firm determination that wouldn't be swayed no matter what. Add bit down on his lips then stared at Elesis.

Elesis had her sword lowered slightly and was just standing still without saying anything. It was as if she was going to wait until the group finished discussing.

“.....How long will you be able to hold out?”

“Wait a moment, Add.”

Eve protested but Add didn't listen to her.

Add hadn't wanted this but things were seriously messed up now. Chloe betrayed them and Eun didn't want to help with time travel saying something nonsensical like it wasn't time yet.

Water was already spilt. In that case, they had to try to get far as they could. He didn't like it, but there was no choice but to bet on Elsword's potential.

"I won't just hold out.... I'll win."

"Alright, then we'll leave this place to Elsword and everyone else will charge into the inner castle."

Overpass connecting to the inner castle was closer to the El Search Party than to Elesis. They could cross it if they wanted to.... But there was no way Elesis would stand idly and let them.

Even if this hallway was wide, going to assist Rena fighting beyond Elesis was impossible unless they defeated Elesis. If that's the case, they'll charge into the inner castle and finish everything once and for all.

Ara got surprised from Add's plan and asked.

"Then what about Ms.Rena?"

"We already sent the signal so the Velder Liberation Army should be heading here soon. Also, Rena wouldn't go down so easily.... Stopping the royal castle's El turning into a Dark El comes first. There's Ran, Karis and Helputt waiting inside so we cannot divide our forces any further."

Actually, battle in the inner castle will be much more difficult than the outer castle. Problem was that the name Elesis carried too much weight.

"Elsword, Rena will clean things up quickly and come to help you soon. Do everything you can until then."

"....."

Eve stared at Elsword as if she couldn't accept this. Everyone already knew how scary of an opponent Elesis was and but they were leaving her only to Elsword?

"Eve, this is what I requested Big Brother Add. Don't worry."

"It's reckless."

"You became stronger too."

Elsword put strength in hands holding his sword then collected his breath.

"That's why I'll become stronger too. Trust me."

"Still...."

“There’s no time. Let’s go.”

When Eve hesitated, Add forcefully grabbed her hand and dragged her away. Not only was there more terrifying enemies waiting inside the inner castle, he also didn’t want to hear the two’s conversation any longer.

“Mr.Elsword, I’ll come back after defeating Elder Brother!”

“Be careful, Elsword.”

Ara and Chung’s said their farewell. Eve was still at a loss for what words to leave Elsword. Add forcefully grabbed Eve’s hand and dragged her away. Rest of the group ran to the overpass but Elesis didn’t even move a step and just stared quietly.

A detached gaze, Elesis finally opened her mouth when the footsteps crossing the overpass got further way.

“Did you finish your final farewells?”

“.....”

Elsword inhaled lightly then stared straight at Elesis.

“No, we’ll meet and talk with each other again.”

“It will become a final farewell if you cannot stop me.”

Elesis fixed her sword then collected her breath as she lowered her stance. A terrifying pressure emanated from her now that she was in attacking stance.

But Elsword didn’t succumb to the pressure and followed suit by lowering his stance. If he loses here, Elesis will follow the party and swing her sword at them. He had to stop her from doing so.

“Here I come, Big Sister.”

“.....Yes.”

With Elesis’ short answer, the siblings charged at each other simultaneously. Swords of red haired warrior and knight sprayed out sparks as they clashed.

It was beginning of the fight to end everything.

Rena drew back her bowstring consecutively soon as the Dark Elves jumped down the stairs. Arrows ruthlessly pelted the Dark Elves’ shoulders and legs.

Many Dark Elves fell screaming but there were still too many of them.

“Hah.....!”

When a Dark Elf approached and swung her dagger, Rena turned around and launched a light roundhouse kick with her bow still in her hand. Dark Elf sensed the incoming danger but it was such a fast kick that she had been already launched away by Rena’s kick when she noticed.

Other Dark Elves looked surprised when their comrade hit the wall and fell. But they continued to press their attack using their numerical advantage. Rena didn’t get startled even for a bit and moved gracefully as the sharp daggers tried to cut her neck and stab her chest.

As if skating on ice, Rena dodged all of their attacks just by lightly kicking the hallway walls to jump then slightly shifting her center of gravity to move out of the attack’s path. She then countered with a precise middle and low kicks. Dark Elves couldn’t even harm a piece of Rena’s clothing and they either got launched away or fell kneeling in pain.

Ssssh!

Just when Rena defeated 10 Dark Elves, an arrow came flying towards her. Rena quickly noticed the danger from the sound waves and turned her head to dodge. She looked up to see Chloe standing on the stair landing personally drawing her bowstring. Not only Chloe but 5 more Dark Elves that came to assist were standing near Chloe aiming their bows.

“Surrender. No matter how strong you are.....”

Rena didn’t even listen to Chloe’s words and lowered her stance as she dashed into the next group of Dark Elves.

After jumping into the group of Dark Elves, Rena pushed down on the ground with her hand and spun around, she drew a circle with her leg. Dark Elves swinging their daggers all got hit by Rena’s attack and staggered from this surprising acrobatic maneuver that aimed for lower parts of their legs. After making the Dark Elves lose their balance with a low spin attack, Rena spun around one more time aiming her kick higher this time.

“Ahhh!”

“Kuugh!!”

Rena stood up after finishing 2 quick rotating kicks. All of the Dark Elves that had been surrounding and threatening Rena were on the ground groaning in pain.

Chloe wanted to shoot arrows at Rena but could only observe because other Dark Elves might get hit accidentally. She murmured with an astonished voice.

“.....Could it be that you’re going easy on us?”

“Because I don’t think this is what Chloe really wants.”

After taking down a group of Dark Elves without having even a piece of her clothing harmed, Rena answered while lightly brushing the dust off her hand. Chloe maintained silence for a bit then ordered.

“Fire.”

ssh! ssh!! Dark Elf archers that were standing ready fired their arrows at Rena all at once. Rena quickly jumped sideways to hide behind corner of the hallway. Rena was collecting her breath when she groaned from the pain on her cheek.

Drip.

“.....Hmm.”

Blood dripped down from the scar Rena got when she dodged Chloe’s first arrow. She thought she had dodged perfectly..... The scar she got from being grazed must have opened up and started bleeding due to her performing physically intensive maneuvers.

Scar itself was no big deal but it was a proof that Chloe’s archery skills were outstanding.

“It won’t be easy after all.....”

“.....Kill her if you must, get her!”

A crude shout was heard from above as if responding to Rena talking to herself. Thankfully, Dark Elves Rena knocked out wouldn’t be able to get up for a while.....

“Still, thanks for not trying to kill me if possible.”

Rena thanked sincerely as she stood up.

She didn’t particularly feel angry at Chloe’s betrayal. It was easy to mistake Rena as an excessively good-natured person because of her warm and embracing personality..... But she was a warrior.

She was a trained warrior that survived through multitudes of battles using her physical combat techniques and arrows.

That’s why while she felt regretful that Chloe changed her mind, she didn’t feel angry. Even without Add’s warning, she had somewhat anticipated this and had been cautious.

In the end, Chloe was leader of the Dark Elves.....she probably couldn’t decide things just based on her personal feelings.

“Alright, I’m worried about the other kids. So.”

Let’s clean this up fast as possible and go help the other kids. Rena calmly made up her mind.....then launched her body sideways while aiming her bow.

Dark Elves that were carefully coming downstairs got surprised and tried to aim their bows soon as Rena suddenly jumped out from her cover. But Rena consecutively firing arrows while still in midair was faster.

Ssh, ssh!

Rena rolled on the floor once then stood up..... All of the Dark Elves that were trying to fire their arrows cried out in pain then fell at the same time. Only Chloe was able to respond to Rena's arrow in time because she was located furthest away on the stair landing. Chloe asked with a ghastly expression.

".....How did you know our locations when you fired those arrows?"

Rena was surely catching her breath behind the cover. It didn't even look like she stole a look outside the cover but she precisely located all of the Dark Elf archers and cleaned them up with a single flurry of arrows. Chloe was really baffled by this.

Instead of answering, Rena pointed at her ears. Chloe became horrified after realizing that Rena had located all of the archers just by sounds of their footsteps and their clothing brushing against themselves. Chloe was proud of her own archery skills but.....her skills didn't even come close to Rena's level.

"You're the only one left Chloe."

Soon as Chloe heard this, she felt a sharp pain across her cheek. She rubbed her cheek with her hand to notice that there was blood coming out. She thought she had dodged perfectly..... But it must have grazed by.

Chloe asked with a stiff voice while being surprised internally.

"....So what? Could it be that you're asking me to surrender? I still have plenty more troops."

Those that fell just now were the Dark Elf elite units but Chloe bluffed. No one was killed because Rena was holding back.... But only one capable of fighting now was Chloe.

"Alright, I'm sorry.... But I'll have to take you down. It seems our kids are in danger."

"Don't take me so lightly, Elf!"

Elf and Dark Elf both bleeding from their cheeks glaring at each other..... simultaneously fired their arrows.

Elsword quickly blocked the sword coming in from a low angle trying to cut off his ankle. But he got pushed back in strength and staggered..... Elsis didn't miss this opening and poured more sword strikes down on him.

Clink! Clank!

Elsword's body got pushed back further and further as the sounds of clashing steel continued. Elsword gritted his teeth and tried to withstand the attacks but there was no way he could take flurry of Elsis' sword strikes head on.

Each strike gave an equivalent shock of a boulder striking his body.

"Uuugh!"

"Are you just going to block?"

Elesis calmly drew her sword backwards then suddenly threw a sharp stab. Elsword felt the danger and quickly dodged by launching his body sideways. He got a feeling that he shouldn't try to block this one.

Crash!

Elsword ran his shoulder into the hallway's wall because he dodged too hastily. But he didn't even get a moment to feel pain because Elsis closed in swinging her sword. Elsword quickly threw his body sideways again.....as the sword Elsis' swung cleanly cut through the wall Elsword had been leaning on just now. Royal castle's hallway that stonemason put hard work into building got cut off cleanly as if the sword was cutting through a cake.

After tearing apart the stone wall as if it was made out of paper, Elsis immediately spun around. She used the momentum from the spin to launch another sword strike against Elsword who was still trying to regain his balance.

Elsword quickly held up his sword with both of his hands to block but his body flew backwards upon impact.

"Arrgh!"

Shock that his sword received got transferred directly into his body. You couldn't carelessly block a sword strike carrying enough power to cut through stone walls. Even if his sword could withstand it, his body was already squarely being damaged.

Elsword's hands shook. He won't even be able to defend properly if this kept up.

"....."

Seeing that Elsword was only focused on defense, Elsis lowered her sword and sighed. She didn't look satisfied.

“It’s no good. Just move aside.”

“.....”

Elsword realized just now that he had been pushed back all the way to the overpass. Elsword shook his head after taking a slight glance backwards.

“It’s not over yet, Big Sister.”

“.....Can’t you see that I’m going easy on you? Your skills aren’t enough to stop me.”

“I know.”

Elsword nodded at Elesis’ concise words. He was a swordsman too. How could he not know? He at least hadn’t got pushed back in strength against Elesis’ 1st form.

But he couldn’t withstand this Elesis’ form even in strength.

“I.....lack in every way compared to you Big Sister.”

“If you know, then why are you still standing your ground? Will you be satisfied once you’re killed by me?”

Elsword shook his head when Elesis protested as if she was scolding him.

“I cannot fight you if not now.”

“.....”

“I got that kind of feeling. That this fight will be the last, and this will be my last chance to properly fight you Big Sister.”

Elesis kept silent but that proved that Elsword’s intuition was correct.

“I don’t know.....why you sided with the demons. But that’s not important. You won’t listen to me anyways even if I tried to convince you. You probably aren’t helping the demons with such a small resolve.”

“If you know that, then why are you fighting me by yourself? It won’t even be enough for all of your comrades to come at me at once.....”

“Because I wanted to have the last fight with Big Sister by myself.”

Elesis gave an empty laugh at Elsword’s calm answer.

“I’d like to play along.... But I don’t have much time. I’ll cut you down for real if you don’t move.”

Elesis' laugh lasted just for a moment as her face turned cold like the sheet of ice. Soon as Elsword shook his head to refuse..... Elesis jumped in with a single stride and swung her sword.

Clank!!

Elsword who was only busy blocking until now swung his sword and responded to Elesis' strike for the first time. Elesis' eyes widened in surprise but then she launched a kick right away. Elsword was too focused on their swords that he got surprised from a sudden kick coming his way and staggered back.

Slash!!

Elesis immediately used this chance to swing her sword and cut Elsword.

The impact was lessened thanks to his armor..... But it wasn't a light wound judging by the amount of blood coming out from his left shoulder. But Elsword didn't back out despite the wound and bravely swung his sword aiming for Elesis' head.

"Too slow....."

Elesis whispered in a low voice. She tried to swing her sword to block Elsword's attack, push him away with her strength then cut across Elsword's waist next.

It was a combo that was possible because she was superior to Elsword in both strength and speed.

But Elsword's sword.....strangely got deflected way too lightly. Elesis' head questioned this but her body was already connecting to the next attack.

Clank!!

Then.....surprisingly, Elesis' sword aiming for Elsword's waist got blocked. Elsword had blocked it as if he knew it was coming beforehand.

But Elsword couldn't have blocked it with his current reaction speed!

As surprised Elesis hesitated for a moment..... Elsword swung his sword this time. Elesis hesitated for a moment to think if she should block it or not then decided to back out and dodge for now.

Then as if he read her intentions, Elsword heavily threw his body forwards to smash down straightly with his sword.

This kind of reckless charge was an act of suicide in normal fights. But for Elesis who was backing out already, she was completely caught off guard.

She hastily turned her body in response to Elsword's pursuing attack. But her shoulder tore and pain flowed in.

“.....”

Elesis quickly backed out to a safe distance then stroked her shoulder as if she couldn't believe it. It wasn't deep, but she was certainly cut just now.

“.....Don't get too careless Big Sister.”

Even though he just landed a successful hit on Elesis for the first time, Elsword didn't even show any signs of gladness and just fixed his stance while panting. He just literally threw his body entire to land a successful attack. If Elesis didn't think to dodge Elsword's first counter attack..... Elsword would have been the one who was cut instead.

“.....Just what were you thinking?”

Elesis tried to suppress her unrest but she couldn't hide her voice from shaking. Even though they were clashing swords and fighting right now, they were precious siblings.....and they also grew up while facing each other's swords.

Elesis even forgot that they were in middle of a fight. She had to reproach him for launching such a foolish attack. She was basically scolding him saying I didn't raise you like this~.

“I knew you would dodge.”

“.....You bet your life on a chance?”

Elsword shook his head while focusing on recovering his stamina. He landed a single successful hit but his enemy was very powerful. His palms hurt so much that it felt like they've been torn apart.

But there was no time to cry about it.

“You would have certainly tried to dodge.”

“.....”

Of course that's what actually happened but Elesis made an expression as if she couldn't understand. Elsword added.

“You just tried to get me with a combo attack. But you never put into account that I would be able to block it. It would have been very surprising for you that I read your second attack and blocked it.”

That was true. Elesis' strength and speed surpassed Elsword's. He shouldn't have been able to respond to her standard counterattack of blocking the head strike then going for the waist.

But he responded. This fact was too surprising.

“Whenever something surprising happens during a fight, Big Sister always tries to back out and examine the situation instead of responding right away.”

“.....”

“I thought I taught you many times not to charge in recklessly at me.”

But Elsword was a type that charged in by relying on his stamina and strength. And Elesis taught him many times not to do that.

“So you guessed my battle pattern? But that was still way too reckless.”

“It wasn’t reckless. You would have certainly reacted that way. Big Sister I know would have certainly done so.”

Elsword spoke with a strong conviction. Elesis nodded.

“I see, so blocking the first combo.... You were able to respond because you read my moves already. Well, you do develop habits while practicing swordsmanship. And you should somewhat have a grasp on my habits.....”

“Not just somewhat.....”

Elsword denied by putting strength in his voice.

“I know everything about Big Sister’s sword. I know all about your skills and special moves as well.”

“.....I see.”

Elesis made a vague smile then nodded. She then took a glance back at the Glitter soldiers observing from behind her. Glitter soldiers realized the meaning behind her gaze and quickly backed away.

Elesis could fire a demonic energy to restrain her targets then hit her target to recover her wounds. This target could even be her ally demons.

But Elesis gave up on cutting down the demons to recover her wound and instead turned around to face straightly at Elsword’s gaze again.

“So you are aware that you lack both in strength and speed. Are you holding your ground just based off a single belief that you know my sword well?”

“This overpass is narrow. No matter how fast Big Sister is, there’s a limit to how fast you can move.”

“.....You shouldn’t have told me that.”

Well, that was true. Even if Elsword knew what attack was coming next, the biggest reason he could respond in time to Elesis’ swift attacks was because Elesis’ mobility was restricted due to this narrow place.

It was slightly advantageous for Elsword to fight in a narrow overpass rather than in the wide hallway.

“I don’t intend to hide anything..... This is my last fight with you after all Big Sister.”

“.....”

Elesis realized what Elsword wanted and chuckled from being taken aback. Elsword was way too honestly conveying his desire. He had absolutely no intention to face Elesis by relying on luck, plans or tricks.

He wanted to stake everything he had to face Elesis with all he got.

“I know you’re my little brother..... but I really don’t know what to say.”

“I’m sorry Big Sister.”

It was a bottomless and endless apology but Elesis didn’t ask anymore. The little brother she grew up with, Elsword who had only followed after her back was now seriously trying to stand in her way.

He was requesting that they compete purely with sword to sword, warrior to knight.

“.....Alright, I’ll accept.”

Elesis smiled vaguely as she held up her sword. She will now throw away her opinion that looked down on Elsword, throw away her soft feelings. She also shut off her wish of wanting to destroy this time without hurting Elsword if possible.

She was happy about her little brother’s growth. Forgetting all the circumstances, Elesis decided to purely marvel at her brother’s resolve and focus on this fight.

“Thank you, Big Sister.”

“You’ll die.....if you don’t fight desperately.”

Elesis withdrew her smile then charged with her full strength at Elsword.

Arrow and arrow flew towards each other. Amazingly.....two arrows collided in the air and were neutralized.

“What.....?”

Chloe was shocked by this but still threw herself off the stairs instantly. This was a battle between archers, Chloe twisted her body to dodge Rena’s incoming arrow then fired her own arrow.

But her arrow was blocked by the arrow Rena shot while standing still.

Rena had predicted how Chloe would react and fired. Rena predicting her actions was understandable, but to make both arrows purposely collide in midair?

It's not an exaggeration to call her a goddess of archery!

There was no way she could win in a ranged combat. Chloe immediately admitted her archery skills fell behind Rena's and closed in for a close quarter combat. Chloe jumped down the entire staircase in a single leap then positioned herself to launch continuous kicks aiming for Rena's legs. But Rena kept spinning around and backing away to easily dodge Chloe's consecutive attacks.

Chloe felt that she shouldn't allow Rena to get any distance between them so she quickly closed in. She absolutely couldn't give Rena a chance to draw her bowstring!

Rena continued to back out from Chloe's ferocious consecutive kicks. After pushing Rena back all the way to the center of the 2nd floor's hallway, Chloe felt that something was off so she launched a jump roundhouse kick then landed. Rena dodged the kick by lightly ducking then noticed Chloe had stopped attacking and asked out of curiosity.

"You're noting going to continue?"

".....How much are you going to make fun of me? Are you going easy on me, Elf?!"

"It's not that. Other Dark Elves might get caught up."

"....."

So she didn't back away because of the pressure from Chloe's continuous attack but was instead just changing the fight location out of consideration for the fallen Dark Elves nearby?

Chloe's mind became numb after finding out the truth.

How can such a person exist? Chloe could have accepted this more easily if Rena's skill just simply overwhelmingly surpassed hers. Karis and Elesis were also terrifyingly powerful after all. But she had never seen someone so powerful with such a caring personality even towards their enemies.

"Just.....what are you trying to do? Aren't you going to fight?"

"Hmm, of course I should fight. But I don't want to harm the other Dark Elves for no reason."

".....What do you mean?"

There were differences in skills but they were enemies right now. Why was this Elf caring about other Dark Elves' wellbeing?

Rena spoke clearly.

"Chloe, you aren't doing this because you want to."

“.....Don’t make me laugh.”

“Is some other general forcing you to do this?”

Chloe got furious and suddenly launched a spin roundhouse kick. This kind of attack was powerful but it blatantly left one wide open for a counter attack so she shouldn’t have used it carelessly. But Rena didn’t exploit this fact and just swiftly backed out to dodge Chloe’s kick.

“Chloe, I don’t want to fight right now. I have to go help the other kids.”

“If you want to, then defeat me! Do you think war is a joke? Elf?!”

“Of course not. But.....”

Rena shook her head then sighed as she dropped her bow on the ground. She lightly flipped her wrists then adjusted her stance.

“Alright, I’ll accept.”

“.....Hmph!”

Chloe took out her dagger and scanned for Rena’s movements. Rena was powerful but that was only when she used her bow. She was an archer so her skills in close quarters had to lack. Chloe was also an archer but she was more confident in her closer quarter combat skills.

She had the advantage close up! Chloe charged in with her dagger in front. But then..... Rena seemed to suddenly jump forward then launched a flying kick.

“What?!”

Rena’s jump was so light that it barely even made a sound. Chloe was shocked by the sudden flying kick coming at her face and quickly blocked with both of her arms.

Bam!!

Chloe’s body got pushed back far after sound of an impact. Chloe bit her lower lips at the throbbing pain.

“Kugh.....”

“Want to continue?”

When Rena asked concisely..... Chloe bit her lower lips then charged in. She did fall behind in ranged combat but there was no way she would fall behind in close quarters.

Chloe positioned herself to launch a high kick. Rena didn’t hesitate and also answered with a high kick of her own. Legs aiming for each other’s heads collided in midair.

“.....Ugh.”

Rena frowned and staggered. Chloe’s eyes flashed in that moment and she swung her dagger. Rena’s archery was godly.....but physical combat was a fight of physique and weight. You could tell just from a glance that Rena wasn’t very heavy!

As Chloe swung her dagger, Rena quickly leaned backwards to dodge then launched a front kick at the same time.

Chloe backed off for a bit after getting her waist kicked by this unexpected acrobatic maneuver. It was a surprising attack but its power wasn’t too great because it was a kick launched from such an unstable posture.

Rena used this moment to somersault backwards to gain some distance then made a pretty frown. Chloe felt that Rena was going to say something useless again so she immediately jumped in while throwing her dagger straightly towards Rena.

Rena tilted her head to dodge the dagger coming at her forehead but she couldn’t evade the following kick from Chloe.

Rena blocked by raising her arms.....but her body got lifted up and ran into a wall. Rena still didn’t fall down and managed to maintain her stance.

“.....”

It was given that Rena didn’t fall down. Rena had sensed she couldn’t dodge Chloe’s flying kick so she had purposely thrown her body backwards to reduce the damage she received.

And beside Rena who just got pushed back was the bow she had put down earlier. Chloe got surprised and stared nervously but Rena didn’t seem she had any intention to pick up her bow.

It was so stupid that she had to say something.

“.....You. Are you making fun of me right now? Why are you insisting on fighting close up even while knowing that you’re at a disadvantage?”

“It’s true, Chloe is strong.”

“Then fight me with your bow as if you want to kill me! What are you trying to do by acting so softly, Elf?!”

“I can’t have Chloe die. Help of the Dark Elves is a must if we want to make peace with the demons after this fight.”

Chloe was at a loss for words at Rena’s firm answer. Was she still speaking about peace even when she was betrayed like this? Even when the fight had already started?

She could say for certain, this was an extremely outlandish individual amongst the Elf race!

“That’s what I meant by making fun of me. Are you going easy on me thinking that you can beat someone like me any time you want?”

“.....I’m not making fun of you. Ugh.”

Rena frowned while brushing the dust off her hands. Chloe sensed something was off from the strange sound Rena made. Rena concluded her explanation.

“Arrow is difficult to control. I might accidentally make a mistake.”

“.....”

So she threw away her bow because she might accidentally kill Chloe? Chloe had never heard something so insulting in her life.

She never got this kind of evaluation even when she returned after losing half her Dark Elves to Aisha.

Chloe was furious to the point where she suspected if steam was coming off her head..... But Rena’s words weren’t over yet.

“And I also thought you might change your mind if I beat you in close up combat.”

“.....How stupid.”

“Will you promise me? That you’ll do as I say if I win.”

“I’m getting sick of this. Just.....”

“I’ll seriously get angry if you tell me to kill you, Chloe.”

Chloe stopped her words at the strange pressure. Rena with her eyes opened narrowly was strongly glaring at her.

“I don’t intend to take life of someone who’s fighting a fight they don’t want to. I don’t know what you’re so afraid of that’s forcing you to do this..... But I’ll take care of it for you.”

“How would you know....”

“I know.”

Rena’s voice just now held such a strong emotion that it even got the strong minded Chloe to shut her mouth.

“I know a person that lost his will and was forced to fight even though he didn’t want to. And how that person is continuing to regret things he has done. I know better than anyone else how much of a large wound it became to that person.”

“.....”

“And how he’s desperately looking for a way to atone amidst the battles.”

She wasn’t talking about someone here right now. Rena spoke with such strong emotion that Chloe was overwhelmed and could only keep silent.

“So Chloe, I don’t want my friend to go through the same thing. I won’t forgive the person that forced you to do this kind of thing.”

“.....Nonsense, you cannot beat that person no matter how powerful you are. No one can.”

Seeing Chloe making a seriously terrified face, Rena loosened her expression and spoke softly.

“If I can’t win by myself then I just have to find a way to win together with the others. That’s how we’ve fought until now.”

“.....”

Chloe didn’t answer anymore and pulled out her spare dagger. It felt like she was going to lose the will to fight if she talked with Rena any longer.

Soon as Chloe charged in with her dagger determined to fight to the death, Rena performed an unbelievable action. It looked like she was lowering her stance then she dived into Chloe while sliding.

“What.....?”

This wasn’t an ice field, what kind of trick was this? It was so startling to Chloe but Rena had already quickly dived in all the way below her. Chloe instinctively made a defensive posture and tried to throw her body backwards to reduce the damage just like Rena did.....

“Hah!”

But Rena’s response was faster. After adjusting the speed of her slide in the last moment with her arm, she pushed up on the ground with both of her hands and launched her body upwards. Rising kick that threw her entire body. The impact broke through the guard Chloe put up with her arms to protect her face and chest.

“?”

Chloe’s body didn’t get thrown backwards and instead got lifted up in the air. Ironically, Chloe’s attempt to throw her body backwards had helped with Rena’s attack.

And the freefall that followed.

Rena had already positioned herself and was throwing a roundhouse kick to match the timing of Chloe's fall. Chloe's eyes and head knew of the incoming kick but she had no way to react to it while freefalling!

Bam!!

Chloe's body went flying spinning in midair after getting her waist kicked. After hitting her head on the wall and falling down on the ground, Chloe quickly stood up but fell kneeling down right after. Not only her ribs were cracked from the attack just now, she also received a light concussion.

"Want to continue?"

"....."

At Rena's calm question, Chloe finally admitted defeat. It was a perfect defeat even with her weight advantage. She couldn't win against Rena even if she were to try hundred more times.

Bow was that Elf's specialty in the first place. Chloe lost even though she fought relying on her opponent's generosity..... The sense of defeat was so large that she didn't know how to handle it.

It was just like Rena said. After losing in closer quarter combat.....she could clearly admit who was stronger.

"Even if I continued to fight..... I won't be able to win."

"Alright, then....."

"But! I still cannot back down for the sake of fate of the Dark Elves!!"

When Chloe shouted and waved her arm, a magic circle appeared around her. Rena recognised what it was and raised her voice in horror.

"Chloe! What do you think you're doing!!?"

"ROK MANDOOS SAMANDA..... Come forth!! Spirit of the demons arise!!"

Answering Chloe's shout, the air started to shake. A dark hole was opened through the magic circle and giant arms and legs appeared through the hole.

Thud!!

It was so huge that hallway, walls and 2nd floor's ceiling broke just from its appearance. Sounds of outer castle's residents screaming from appearance of this beast capable of destroying the outer castle just by moving was heard. Everyone must have not known there was a fight going on because the fight had been occurring mostly close to the 3rd floor.

Rena groaned after confirming the frantic footsteps running away with her ears and then confirming the giant beast howling with her eyes. She couldn't understand at all. Even after she clearly displayed their difference in strength, Chloe was persisting to fight even by summoning the Dark Elf's guardian god Dark Nephilim.

".....Just why? Why are you going so far?"

".....You don't know, Elf. You will never know how terrifying D is."

Chloe shook her head sadly. She then raised her voice as if she didn't want to listen to Rena's answer.

"Alright, rampage. Dark Nephilim!!"

Gwwaaarrrrrr!!

Giant beast large enough to shatter the Velder's outer castle howled with all its might.

Blood dripped down. Elsword panted while looking at the blood dripping down his sword. Most of the blood was flowing down from Elsword's arms, shoulders and hands.

"Around 2 times out of 5, not bad."

Elesis evaluated coldly after pushing Elsword back all the way to the end of the overpass. She had also received light injuries on her abdomen and shoulder but she was still faring far better than Elsword. This wasn't because she used her recovery ability.

To commend Elsword for requesting to face her by himself in a pure contest of skill without his comrades or strategies, Elesis had also faced him by herself using only her sword.

Thus, she had overwhelmed Elsword in a pure contest of swordsmanship.

"There's nothing to be surprised about, Elsword. If you know my sword better than anyone else in the world....I know your sword better than anyone else in the world as well."

"That's right. I.... also learned a lot from Big Sister after all."

Elsword was focused but the hands holding his sword was shivering. This was too reckless after all. Add wasn't mistaken.

Elesis was way too powerful. Even if there were 10 Elswords.... No, even 100 more Elswords wouldn't be enough to come out of this victorious. Not only that, Elesis was going easy on him even now.

She wasn't recovering her wounds, she was certainly holding back.

“Who is superior has already been determined. If you continue to fight.....you’ll die. Are you still not going to stand aside?”

Elesis was happy at her brother’s growth and had faced him seriously only with swordsmanship. But she didn’t feel like pushing any further once the match looked like it was decided. Elesis cooled herself then requested calmly.

I’d like you to stand aside if possible. But Elsword shook his head despite knowing the meaning behind Elesis’ request.

“Why? Why are you being so stubborn? Is it because of your friends?”

“.....”

When Elsword didn’t answer, Elesis nodded reluctantly.

“Alright, I won’t kill anyone in the El Search Party. I’ll just render them incapable of fighting. That’s the far as I can concede.”

“I won’t stand aside.”

“Why are you being so stubborn? Do I really have to.....”

“I won’t move even if I die.”

Elsword spoke stubbornly. Sadness rose up in Elesis’ face. She hadn’t showed any signs of trouble when she was facing the El Search Party in the past. It was rare for her to show this much emotion but Elsword didn’t care about it at all.

“Then why? Explain it to me. What else do you want? Do you want me to stand in the side of protecting Elrios again?”

“No.”

“....Then just why?”

Elesis asked sadly. Elsword fixed the grip on his sword.

“Fight me properly, Big Sister.”

“.....What?”

“Fight me seriously. Don’t go easy. Recovery skill or anything else, use anything you want.”

“.....Are you insane?”

Elesis was showing so much direct emotion to the point where Add would have been very surprised if he saw her now.

“This right now isn’t Big Sister’s true power. Use your full power.”

“.....Are you saying you want to die by me? I won’t ask you to understand my choices.... But is this really the ending you want?”

When Elesis bit her lips and asked painfully, Elsword stared at her with a surprised expression.

“What are you talking about, Big Sister?”

“.....Huh?”

“I want to fight Big Sister. That’s why I won’t stand aside.”

It was a pure request for a fight. Elesis blinked from realizing what he meant. Of course, she had also lived her life wielding the sword so she also understood competitive mindset and the desire to fight very well.

“Show me Big Sister’s full power.”

“.....Alright.”

Elesis realized Elsword’s resolve and nodded.

Let’s throw away all hesitations. She had been determined not to slay Elsword no matter what.....But this time was messed up as well.

“I got it. It might be better for you to die by my hand.....than having to see the end of time.”

Elesis spoke with a sorrowful expression.

“I’m sorry, Elsword. I’ll end it....painlessly.”

“.....It’s not over yet.”

Elsword answered quietly then moved his sword with all his strength. This was a narrow area and he knew the trajectory of Elesis’ attack. Just as he expected, Elesis was running in trying to perform a wide swipe.

“Ugh!!”

Elsword saw it coming with his eyes and tried to follow up with his body by swinging his sword. But he was too fatigued. His sword was being delayed due to his body, due to his overworked bones and muscles screaming out in pain.

Clank!!

He barely managed to block it but his stance broke down. Kneeling down on one knee, Elsword saw Elesis’ sword ruthlessly flying towards him again and swung his sword the best he could.

Clank!!

A clear sound rang out as steels clashed. It was a refreshing sound. Elsword raised his sword to block the oncoming multiple sword strikes but he couldn't even block half of them. He rolled to dodge soon as his upper arm got cut but Elesis didn't give him any moment to rest and pressured again.

Her movement was many times faster than before. Elsword could easily see the attacks coming because he knew all about Elesis' attack methods, he could see them even better now that he familiarized himself by fighting her directly..... But his body couldn't follow up.

He wanted to attack.

“.....Ah”

He felt burdened by this body that could only manage to block. He finally could see them coming, but fighting any more was too much for his exhausted body. But this was the only time he could have a fight like this, it was a once in a lifetime fight..... He hated himself for being so weak.

It can't be helped. That person is my Big Sister, Elesis. Strongest person in the world. It's obvious for me to get pushed back like this.

No.

“.....I”

His sword shook. His body couldn't move as he wished because his hands were shaking.

That's right. I did well considering how Big Sister was my opponent. She promised not to kill the others so.....it shouldn't matter if I fell here.

“.....I don't.”

Elesis was the strongest person in the world, sun that shined brighter than anything else. But that sun turned her back on the light and faced the darkness. This fact was so shocking that he despaired and gave up fighting. But he chose to grab his sword again and face her head on in the end.

Everyone believed in Elsword's choice. That he will certainly be able to fight Elesis. That Elsword can surely surpass Elesis.

Eve, Ara, Rena and Add.

They all believed in him, fought together with him.

But they still lost.

It was a fight where they were glad just to have survived.

He lost even though everyone had believed in him.

Yes, of course. Big Sister is stronger than anyone else after all. I can't win no matter how much I try. This kind of feeling had lingered in his heart.

This feeling certainly existed even during the beach when he vowed in front of everyone that he was going to fight Elesis again.

This feeling didn't change even after he returned to Velder to settle things with his older sister. This feeling hasn't disappeared even in this fight. It wasn't a hesitation to fight his blood sibling. You had to call it worship instead.

For Elsword, Elesis shined brighter than anyone else in the world.

But,

Even though he possessed a feeling of wanting to always absent-mindedly look up at his sister, that shouldn't be Elsword's everything.

".....I don't want."

Elsword gritted his teeth. A different wavering feeling made his shaking body rise up. Life returned to his hands that were losing strength.

A will sprouted up.

Behind him were his friends that believed in him and went ahead. They all believed that Elsword could surpass Elesis. They all believed that Elsword could succeed even though they knew he was throwing himself into a foe that was too much for him, into a reckless fight.

Even though Elsword had lost once already, even though they knew he held feelings of admiration towards Elesis, even though they knew his skills were hopelessly lacking..... They entrusted him with this fight.

He was happy. He didn't know how to describe this feeling but he knew for certain that he was very happy.

Boy who had only been running after his sister's back was able to meet people who believed that he could succeed.

Another feeling rose up along with his admiration towards his sister.

"I don't want to lose!!"

Clank!! Elesis' sword that had been launching fierce attacks suddenly shook widely. Elsword who was barely alive and was only managing to barely block her attacks just launched a desperate counter. Elesis got shocked and backed out. Elsword was kneeling on one knee with his sword lying horizontally on the ground. He wasn't moving.

Did he die? Elesis examined in surprise. She then heard Elsword's quiet breathing. A voice so small as if he was whispering in someone's ear traveled across the overpass.

"I always admired you Big Sister. Even in this moment where we're fighting....and forever from now..... Big Sister will shine brighter than anyone else in the world."

".....I see."

After deciding that had been Elsword's final struggle, Elesis fixed the grip on her sword to finish this. But Elsword staggered as he stood up.

"Even while fighting like this..... I'm thinking that I cannot surpass you. That following after you is all I can manage. You are amazing after all, Big Sister."

"....."

"But I still don't want to lose. Even if I'm fighting against Big Sister who's the strongest person in the world..... I cannot afford to lose this fight. I have friends that went ahead believing in me."

"You can't win only with that kind of tender heart and petty resolve. It looks like you still have a long way to go."

Block just now had been his final struggle. Elsword didn't have any strength remaining to fight anymore. Elesis bitterly shook her head then approached slowly as she swung her sword.

Sharp attack flying in aiming for his neck. Elsword was too exhausted to even try to block it. He couldn't see properly because his eyes were already blurry.

But he still wanted to fight. He didn't want to back out from here.

"The sword....."

Clank!! Unbelievably, it was Elesis' sword that was deflected. Elesis examined Elsword with a confused expression as the incomprehensible events continued.

Elsword was exhausted and panting heavily, but he strangely didn't feel tired.

His body felt heated. His heart felt hot. This feeling right now, he didn't know what to call this feeling that was a mix of his feeling towards Elesis and his feeling of wanting to answer his friends' expectations.

Flash! As if to answer the desire coming from bottom of Elsword's heart, a crimson flame started to burn up from his body.

No, it wasn't a flame. Elsword's Memory of Time and Space was answering to his will and emitting light.

Faced with a giant wall he had to overcome, old memories flashed by in the boy's eyes.

Elesis back when she was young.

Elesis swinging her sword and him standing beside her following her moves.

Elesis whose skills had improved so much in such a short time and him who was weak in comparison.

Elesis who left to join the Red Knights without leaving any words. And the times he spent looking at her empty bed again and again, resenting, struggling, trying to understand.

I'm weak so I won't be of any help to my sister even if I'm beside her. Big Sister went to meet and fight with stronger people after all.

So let's quickly become stronger myself. So that I can be a match for Big Sister.

At the news about the strongest Red Knights captain coming for afar, he also became a knight because he wanted to meet her no matter what, because he wanted to stand on equal terms with her.

He became a knight but he was still weak. He could never be satisfied even though people told him he was strong. He wanted to become even stronger so he went on a journey.

Then he met Eve.

‘That’s right.....’

Eve was truly a good friend. She stayed together with Elsword who fought restlessly from wanting to catch up to his sister soon as possible. Elsword would have gone astray at one point if it weren’t for Eve.

He was glad to have such a good friend who nagged from beside him and sometimes showed cute sides of herself.

And he also met good people. Rena, Ara, Chung and Add.....the times he spent with them were joyful but he couldn’t completely erase his uneasy heart.

He wanted his Big Sister to recognise him.

She betrayed Elrios. But stuff like that didn’t matter at all. She’s still my Big Sister. Big Sister I’m proud of, I wanted to show her how much I’ve grown and have her recognise me.

I wanted her to be proud of me. I wanted her to let me stay beside her.

“Right, but that’s not it.....”

What came up most clearly in front of his eyes weren’t something like that. Elsword had convinced himself he had such thoughts..... But that wasn’t everything.

Just why had he insisted on taking this fight alone? To show Elesis how much he changed and get her to recognise him? He indeed had these thoughts.

But that couldn’t be everything. They had already faced Elesis once before. In that fight, even if it was just for a moment, Elsword had grasped victory thanks to the other Search Party members’ help. Elesis had recognised this too and that was why she had revealed her hidden power.

If it was just to be recognised, it would have been better to fight together with all of the El Search Party members.

“But this is more.....”

His heart was pounding. It wasn’t because his body was engulfed in flames. He was happy that he could move his body.

He was happy that he could compete with his such powerful sister a bit longer. He wanted to fight more properly. He wanted to make his sister happy.

And he wanted to be happy as well.

“Ah.....”

Boy stared straightly at the image that formed most clearly amongst his memories. The younger days of the siblings where they each held a wooden sword and fought each other all day.

Elesis at that time was smiling.

Elsword at that time was smiling.

Who was stronger wasn't important.

He was merely so happy that there was someone he could contest his sword with to his heart's content.

Elsword opened his eyes. While Elesis looked on with a surprised expression, Elsword realized the words he had to say.

Elsword spoke quietly, putting his desire, his wish into his words.

“The sword is..... nostalgic.”

With those words, Elsword's sword and body was consumed by a giant pillar of flame. Elesis' eyes widened from seeing the pillar of flame that rose up to break through the overpass' ceiling.

“Could this be.....?”

“Haaaah!!”

Elsword jumped out of the pillar of flame by cutting through it then charged at Elesis. Elesis hastily blocked but she was the one that got helplessly deflected this time.

“.....”

She just got beaten in a contest of strength. Elesis stared at Elsword while being surprised by this fact. Elsword who grew up from surpassing time raised his sword then declared.

“Armageddon Blade!”

At his shout, powerful mana flowed through the great sword to make it gigantic. Elesis looked at the great sword that suddenly increased double in size then laughed quietly.

She was so satisfied by this result that there was nothing else to say.

Knight of knights (Lord Knight) threw a challenge towards the strongest Red Knights captain. Then it was now time to give it everything she had and even risk her life to bring out all of Elsword's skills!

“Brutal Cutter!!”

Eleisis' claymore got covered in dark demonic energy to also become gigantic.

After enhancing their swords, siblings quietly collected their breaths. Then the siblings simultaneously charged at each other swinging their swords without even letting out a shout.

Stuff like who was their enemy and the reason they started fighting didn't matter anymore. Only thing left was to determine who was stronger.

“Haaah!”

The dark red demonic sword blew away the overpass' ceiling when Elesis raised her sword high to smash down. But Elsword's Armageddon Blade easily blocked Elesis' sword then started to pressure her with raw strength.

“Ugh?!”

Elesis hadn't even imagined she would get pushed back in strength. She gritted her teeth trying hold out but she was still getting pushed back. Elsword continued to push in tactlessly with his raw strength. Elesis groaned and made Elsword back off by kicking his leg.

“Not bad at all.”

Elesis was astonished but still moved her sword swiftly. If she got pushed back in strength then she'll overwhelm him with speed. Each time Elesis' demonic sword sprayed out a dark energy, the overpass' ceiling and walls got torn apart as if they were made out of paper.

“Hah!!”

In response, Elsword also started swinging his sword swiftly. Even though he fell behind in speed, he'll overwhelm her in strength!!

Elesis knew all too well that allowing their swords to clash will end up with her getting pushed back in strength. She quickly backed out and shouted.

“Ejection!”

A skill she hadn't used until now, Elsword jumped high soon as Elesis gathered demonic energy. Elesis was just about to eject the demonic energy but saw that Elsword was trying to roll in the air and smash down with his sword. She quickly gave up using Ejection Buster and backed out.

Crush!

Elsword's smash had so much power that it made a crack on the sturdy overpass floor. Elsword didn't let up and swung his sword while spinning around. His attacks were dangerous because Armageddon Blade had such a long reach.

"Ugh!!"

Elesis's body got pushed back far from being forced to block Elsword's strike with her sword. Elsword didn't let this chance go and immediately charged in. Dismay rose up in Elesis' face. Elsword up till now had been barely managing to defend. But his attacks had a terrifying pressure to them now that he was starting to display such recklessly rushing tendencies.

"Injection!"

Elesis hastily threw demonic blades around her body then held her sword in long reach to swing it down at Elsword. Elesis' Brutal Cutter also had a long reach so it was a move worth trying.

Clank! But Elsword caught the demonic sword trying to smash down on his head with his own sword then started to push in directly. Swords grinded against each other and let off sparks. Elesis hadn't expected Elsword to push his offensive directly like this so she quickly jumped off the overpass. This was the only way to evade.

Thud! After lightly jumping down from 3 floors high, Elesis looked up then became extremely shocked and dodged. Elsword was also jumping off without any hint of hesitation and was trying to smash down his sword at Elesis.

Crush!! Elsword's Armageddon Blade smashed down on the stone floor and utterly destroyed it. Elesis murmured while discretely hiding her cold sweat.

".....Amazing."

It was certainly worth enduring through all those countless self-mortifications while believing in Elsword's possibility. If it's Elsword, he can surely.....!

"Haaaaaah."

Just when Elsword repositioned his sword and was preparing to fight again, sound of an explosion was heard from far away and the outer castle broke down. Elesis looked towards the direction of the explosion out of curiosity to see that a giant beast had appeared and was pulverising the outer castle.

".....It's Dark Nephilim. Chloe, she's done it now."

But Elsword wasn't looking towards the direction of the mayhem. Elesis who had unknowingly gotten distracted stared at Elsword who was in his pause stance and asked.

"It will be after your friend. Are you fine with continuing to fight me?"

"It's fine."

Elsword answered without any doubt in his voice.

"My friends went ahead believing that I'll defeat you Big Sister. So I'll also defeat you while believing that my friends will win."

".....You're incredible."

Elesis nodded while admiring sincerely. Elsword just received a compliment but he looked like he was dissatisfied.

He urged as if he was thirsty from a yearning that wouldn't fill.

"Let's continue, Big Sister."

"Alright, wait a moment....."

Responding to Elsword's urge, Elesis flicked her sword down to her side. Then a flame rose up from the end of her sword. Dark red flames rising up from her sword seemed to engulf her body then burned up into a dark armor.

"As you are right now.....you should be able to fight equally even against this power of the devil."

"Then try to hang on best you can, Big Sister."

".....It's true that you've become stronger. But you're in for a lot of hurt if you take your Big Sister lightly."

Elsword shook his head heavily at Elesis' warning.

"I'm not taking you lightly. I just.....want to fight with you for a long time."

"Yes, it's the same for me as well."

She has happy at her brother's remarkable growth. She wanted to personally confirm the improved Elsword's strength with her sword.

Elesis smiled joyfully and Elsword smiled back.

Siblings trying to best each other with everything they got smiled from the bottom of their hearts.



Siblings trying to best each other with everything they got
smiled from the bottom of their hearts.

“Alright, let’s test how much stronger you’ve become, Elsword!”

“Thank you, Big Sister!!”

Elsword shouted in joy and charged in towards Elesis.

Inner Castle.

Unpleasant sensation ran by soon as they entered the inner castle. Shiver passed from his head all the way down to his feet. Add was surprised after looking around his surroundings. They had all entered together but only one left was Eve who he was grabbing on to.

“What happened to Ara and Chung?”

“Wait a moment.....”

Add looked around the surroundings then looked up towards the ceiling. View up top was twisting and distorting, it waved as if it was shimmering from heat. But in contrast to the ceiling, building’s interior built out of stone felt way too cold.

Not only that, he could confirm with his eyes the small and large stones slowly levitating up towards the top. There was an anti gravity field formed on the skies.

Add adjusted his jacket then fired Dynamo’s electric current towards the empty air.

Pzzt!

Electric current that went flying forwards suddenly rose up as if it was being dragged by something up top. Almost like opposite poles of a magnet attracting to each other.

Result was the same even when he tested two more times.

“.....This isn’t a natural space. Space distortion is active on the entire building. Not just that, it’s set up so you can never figure out this is going on from outside the building.”

“So you’re saying this is a maze. Will Chung and Ara be alright?”

“Probably. They must have gotten dropped off somewhere else because we entered a little bit faster than them. This structure is set up so multiple people could enter from a same place but each end up somewhere different.”

“Then let’s go find them soon as possible.”

Eve spoke but Add shook his head.

“Space-time theory is my speciality. I can time.....”

“.....”

Add swallowed his words when Eve stared straightly at him. He almost unconsciously said he had been time traveling.

“Anyways, I know about this well... This is not a normal space-time. It will be faster to find and destroy the culprit creating this space than to find those two.”

“I understand.”

Eve must have accepted because she nodded then looked around the area. They had certainly entered through a door but a wall was blocking their way back now.

“The entrance we just came through has disappeared as well. We won’t even be able to get out like this.”

“Teleport won’t work as well. I can’t get the space-time coordinates. So I don’t know where we’ll end up if we tried.”

“Then your battle capabilities will drop significantly.”

“.....That’s true.”

Add tried firing a Void Impact as a test but it exploded higher up than he calculated. This mean that a wide area space distortion large enough to engulf this entire building was occurring..... But he had no idea how such a thing was possible.

Of course, in normal circumstances, he just had to input the information about how the space distortion was occurring into his calculations beforehand. That’s how he could use his skills normally after they entered Velder despite Aisha’s spatial barrier covering over the entire area.

But that didn’t work inside this pitch-dark inner castle.

“Space distortion rate is changing ceaselessly.....”

Add murmured in astonishment. Process of changing the royal castle’s El into a Dark El was occurring, but can it also make this possible? They entered the inner castle without any information about what’s inside....and now Add’s offensive capabilities were significantly reduced.

“I understand. Then let’s move together.”

Add made a startled expression when Eve pulled on his hand. Of course, he lacked strength so he got dragged helplessly.

But seeing how Add wasn’t cooperating, Eve sent him a gaze as if she couldn’t understand.

“This place is dangerous.”

“N, no. I know that.....”

This was a scary place where they could get separated even by entering a second late. Eve’s suggestion of them moving closely as possible was correct.

“Also, your speculation about how we were separated because of time differences is imperfect. It doesn’t explain how Chung and Ara were separated but we’re still together. I certainly stepped on that doorstep later than you.”

“.....”

It was true that Eve’s steps were late due to her looking back at Elsword. According to Add’s theory, Add, Eve, Ara and Chung should have all been separated. But in reality, Eve and Add had entered together.

“I judge that we didn’t have a problem because we were connected to each other. We don’t know what kind of danger lies ahead so let’s move together.”

“.....Okay.”

The word connected felt strangely awkward. But Eve murmured while not noticing Add’s reaction.

“It would have been better for us to all enter connected if we knew this would happen.”

“Uh.....”

Why was she describing holding each other’s hands with such a dictionary like word?

Add didn’t have any idea how he should describe his thoughts to Eve. But Eve started walking with a cool expression with Reby and Moby in front of her.

It didn’t seem she would let go no matter what kind of danger lay ahead of them.

“.....Let’s head up.”

“Are you certain?”

“You saw the electric currents rising up earlier right? There should be a clue that will explain this phenomenon.”

“Alright.”

Eve nodded then walked in front. Add got dragged for couple more steps. He then shook his head and tried to quickly stand beside Eve but paused.

That will have to wait until his strangely reddened face cooled down.

“Do you think Elsword will be alright?”

“.....”

It cooled down. Add bit his lower lips from the constricting feeling inside his chest then hastened his steps to stand beside Eve.

His head became cooler.

“I already warned Rena to be cautious since there was a high chance that Dark Elves might set up a trap. Also, if Elsword and Rena are together, they should be able to deal with Elesis somehow.”

“Yes, Rena had never fought seriously so far.”

“.....”

Did Eve know as well? At Add’s gaze, Eve answered while only looking forwards.

“I’m still worried. Let’s quickly finish things up in the inner castle then head outside.”

“.....You must be worried about Elsword.”

Add asked this even while knowing he was digging his own grave. Eve answered short and precisely.

“Yes.”

“.....”

A rough taste lingered in his mouth. It felt like he had a spoonful of sand in his mouth. Feelings of wanting to let go of Eve’s hand and wanting to pretend he hadn’t heard anything was coexisting.

“Aren’t you worried about Elsword?”

“Wh....”

Why would I be worried about that kid? This word was momentarily about to come out but Add bit his lips in the end. He would have liked to blurt that out on the spur of the moment..... But that wasn’t his true feeling.

There was no way he wasn’t worried about Elsword who chose to face Elesis all by himself for everyone’s sake, in order to let the other members go ahead. Add also wanted to finish the issue in the inner castle soon as possible.

But this feeling and another feeling were creaking against each other and making an ugly sound. Even while knowing he will regret it if he revealed this, that it was foolish of him to ask this, it was difficult for Add to resist the urge to speak up.

“How would you have felt.....if the positions were changed?”

“What do you mean?”

Eve asked confusedly and Add wanted to hit his own mouth. Thankfully, he was only holding Eve with one hand so he could hit it with his free hand.

..... It was so stupid to feel thankful about this.

Add shut his mouth as if he never said anything then maintained silence. Eve and Add's footsteps rang out through the empty building.

"It's a stairway leading up."

A spiral stairway appeared after they moved past about two more rooms. Eve was looking up to see how far up the stairway reached. Add was just calculating the space distortion rates to suppress his complicated feelings.

"You shouldn't trust everything you see in this strange space but this does look like we can reach the building's highest level."

".....Then let's go."

Add spoke then stepped forward after finally managing to settle his feelings. But Eve didn't move.

She pondered for a bit then opened her mouth.

"It would have been the same even if the positions were changed."

"....."

A late reply came from the question he wanted her to ignore. Seeing Add stare blankly from nervousness, Eve spoke calmly.

"My worries towards Rena, Ara, Chung and Elsword right now are not different. I would have been worried about you just the same if you fell into a different space than me."

"....."

Would she have really? No, of course she would be..... But can she say that she isn't worried about Elsword more than everyone else?

Add knew this wasn't a question he would get an answer to. He also knew it was strange of him to ask this question. That's why he hadn't asked directly.

He didn't know why he wanted to ask this. But he could feel that understanding this will help him come to a conclusion about something in his mind.

"I....."

It was reluctant to ask directly. But there were words that lead her to answer. Add conveyed to Eve seriously.

“Would have been worried about you more than the others.”

“.....”

Eve stared at Add straightly at his sudden words. But Add didn't avoid her gaze.

Because what he said was true.

It really was. Add's goal for joining the El Search Party was to steal Eve's core. Things came this far because bunch of events happened in the middle. But his true goal hasn't changed even once.

For Add, Eve's core, Eve was more precious than anything. To the point where he would jump through time.

“Thank you.”

“.....”

Is that all he got as a response? Add couldn't hide his disappointment and was smiling bitterly....when Eve added.

“I also think of you as a precious friend. I couldn't understand you at the start. But I know now that you worry and care about others very much.”

“Uh.....”

Who took care of who? I just used them for my goals. Add almost instinctively answered like this but shut his mouth. This wasn't a timing to answer like this.

“I know that you are actually a very kind and warm person.....”

“No, who is.....”

He couldn't bear to withstand these words anymore..... He didn't understand how his image got distorted like this.

Everyone else had such positive personalities and was overflowing with naive tendencies. He hadn't wanted to get caught up in that so that was why he said couple of words to them....then started participating in overall negotiations and strategy meetings. That's probably how things ended up like this.....

“.....”

Come to think of it, he did so much work. He had gotten used to it at some point but thinking about this objectively, Add had become the El Search Party's brain and representative.

No, it was a necessary task if he wanted to use the information he got from time travels effectively. Not only that, while Rena had outstanding social skills, she was way too kind to straight up deny someone. And seeing Rena act like this made him angry.

The explanation got long..... But it was true that Add had been doing all sorts of work for sake of the El Search Party. Eve wouldn't know but didn't he also turn back time multiple times to fight for the result he wanted?

“.....Ah.”

Add suddenly realized why he ended up challenging over 20 million times. He didn't know why his memories about them had disappeared, but he now clearly knew why he had never given up and challenged again.

“I, I.....”

Have the El Search Party defeat the demons safely, make Eve look at him then steal her core. Add had continued through all those fights he couldn't remember in order to obtain this goal.

Him from the past must have also challenged countless times in order to achieve this goal.

“I.....”

Add bit down hard on his lower lips after realizing this. He didn't know what to do with this feeling lingering in his chest right now. Eve who was staring straightly at Add suddenly let go of Add's hand then tiptoed up.

Eve placed her hand on top of Add's head then spoke calmly.

“Good job. Splendid.”

“.....”

Add's face turned red. He got flustered and didn't know how to react for a second then hit Eve's arm away.

“D, don't treat me like a kid!”

Eve was silent for a moment at Add's fierce reaction then spoke quietly.

“I tried following what Rena did. So it wasn't something I should do after all. Now that I think about it, it does seem no different from Elsword's rude actions I'm sorry.”

“.....”

Add was suddenly at a loss for words and flailed his arms. After finally being able to speak again, Add spoke sparsely.



“No, umm... How should I say it? I, it’s not like I hated it.”

“I’ll be careful from now on. Let’s start moving.”

“W, wait. Wait a moment.”

Add called anxiously when Eve tried to close the topic. It was way too embarrassing and he didn’t know what to say because he was so flustered. But he couldn’t end it like this.

“I, I just got too flustered.”

“Yes, I’ll be careful.”

“Not that, what I meant was.....”

Eve’s straight gaze was bothersome. Add barely managed to organize his words while looking down only at his feet.

“.....Sorry, continue doing that.”

Eve nodded then tiptoed again to pet Add’s hair. Add didn’t have any confidence to keep his head up so he only looked down at his feet. But he could still see that Eve was in front of him.

And also felt the touch of her hand on his head.

It was a small and cold hand, but it felt warmer than anything else in the world for Add.

“.....Ah.”

It felt like he was being rewarded for the countless fights up till now and everything he suffered through even by jumping through time.

This is good. I’m satisfied with this.

I got what I wanted.

“Good job.”

“.....Thanks.”

Add barely managed to nod at Eve’s words then clenched his fists. His heart warmed up and he felt assured that he obtained what he wanted.

Now let’s finish up the demons then steal Eve’s core.

“Bit more.....”

Even if that meant destroying everything he built up until now. Even if doing so will imprison him in eternal regret.

There was no other path for Add. Going back to the past was everything for him.

“Let’s stay like this a bit more.”

“Sure.”

Eve answered shortly then continued to pet Add’s head. Add suppressed his urgency again and again.

Everyone was fighting risking their lives right now. He knew he had to hurry..... But he didn’t want to move.

Because this time will never come again.

Eve didn’t urge him to be hasty and continued to do as he asked. Add wanted to stay like this forever. But he shook his head and took a step backwards.

“.....Let’s go.”

Eve didn’t say anything in response to Add’s quiet words and just held out her hand. Add stared at Eve’s face for a long while then slowly grabbed her hand.

Today will be the last time that he can see this face.

Let’s finish everything today.

Ara and Chung ran inside the inner castle then felt their feet get lifted up. They realized Add and Eve were gone.

“Where’s Ms.Eve and Mr.Add?”

“I’m not sure, they were certainly in front of us.....”

Chung trailed his words after looking back doubtfully at the entrance they came through. They had certainly come through a door but there was only a wall behind them now.

“Ah.....”

While pondering if he should destroy the wall as a test, Chung turned forwards after hearing Ara’s surprised voice. He doubted his eyes.

The place two of them ended up in after entering the inner castle was a cavern. They could tell this place was located very deep underground judging by how the only light source was sunlight coming in through the small cracks between rocks and bricks on the ceiling.

But the issue wasn’t their location but people in front of them. People sitting in front of Ara and Chung were Ran and Helputt.

“Father.....”

“Elder Brother!”

Ara raised her voice as she grasped her spear tightly. But Ran and Helputt who were seated took a glance at the two of them then nodded.

“Ara, come here.”

“I was waiting, son.”

There were two empty chairs at the table in front of Ran and Helputt. It was as if they were waiting for two of them to arrive. But Ara and Chung didn’t move despite being called.

“Could this be an illusion?”

“Lord Eun is saying it’s not.....”

Ara slightly shook her head to clear Chung’s suspicions.

Even without Eun’s words, the atmosphere in this place was telling them they weren’t hallucinating. Also, even though Ara looked ahead slightly with foresight, she couldn’t see Ran and Helputt trying to harm two of them yet.

“Father, just why.....are you here together with Ran? Didn’t you pass away?”

“.....Could it be that Sir Helputt also became a demon like Elder Brother and is being controlled?”

Ara carefully brought up a hypothesis.

This was an obvious possibility after seeing Helputt intervene and evacuate Ran. But Ara and Chung had avoided mentioning about this so far.

Presenting a rash supposition might have hurt Chung. But this possibility couldn't be postponed any longer.

"But I certainly saw father pass away, I saw him get cut down by Ran's blade then fall off the cliff. But how come....."

Chung looked at Helputt again with a face full of question. Helputt's entire body was covered in heavy armor so his face couldn't be seen. Helputt shook his head.

"I'm sorry for not telling you beforehand."

It didn't look like he was being controlled judging by the way he spoke. Then why was he standing in the side of the demons together with Ran?

Chung brought up a possibility that he hadn't tried to think about if possible.

"Then father.....could you possibly have betrayed Hamel? Did you join hands with the demons?"

"....."

Ara looked sadly at Chung when he shouted in confusion.

Ran at least had an excuse that he became a demon because of Karis. Helputt was completely fine but had joined the demons. It was way too obvious for Chung who had believed Helputt was killed by Ran and was burning with desire for revenge to become caught up in turmoil right now.

"It will be a long story. Have a seat first."

"....."

Chung didn't move despite Helputt's call and shook his head.

"Tell me why. Just why? Why did you betray Hamel?!"

"He didn't betray. We've been played."

Ran who was drinking a beverage answered instead. Ran shrugged when Chung glared at him with burning eyes.

"It's a long story. Are you going to listen while standing, son of Helputt?"

"Been played? By whom? Could it be that Karis plotted all of this?"

Helputt answered Ara's question.

"D."

".....D"

“D.....?”

Ara and Chung stared at each other confusedly from the unfamiliar word. They had never heard someone with a name like that amongst the demon generals. Ara was making a troubled face then she suddenly got surprised.

“I heard that name in Feita.”

“Even if that D person plotted all of this, it doesn’t explain why father joined hands with the demons.”

Chung spoke heavily then grabbed his Destroyer. He looked settled on what he should do. Ara noticed this and also aimed her spear at Ran.

“Elder Brother, quickly tell us how to get out of this place! We have to go help the others!”

“What an impatient son you have, Helputt.”

“You’re one to talk.”

Ran and Helputt looked at each other when Ara and Chung showed hostility towards them. Two men sent a bitter gaze towards each other then finally opened their mouth.

“D is **Destiny**. Destiny we absolutely cannot defy, we’re all imprisoned inside it.”

“To defy that **Darkness**, I had no choice but to do this. I won’t ask you to understand why.”

“Now the end of time approaches.”

“The moment when everything despairs!”

Ran and Helputt got up from their seats then grabbed their weapons. Things had already come too far to resolve this just with words.

Ara and Chung looked at each other’s faces then nodded.

“I don’t know too much about difficult words, Elder Brother. But no matter whom my opponent is, even if Elder Brother Aren is my enemy, my heart of wanting to fight for my friends won’t change. Prepare yourself!!”

“Father, I believe that you have your reasons for making this kind of choice. But I carry the hearts of people of Hamel on my back. No matter what your reason is, I cannot avoid fighting you who has turned your back on Hamel!”

“Good, the time painting this kind of ending isn’t bad either.”

“Come, son. Show me how much stronger you’ve become!”

Four of their shouts got mixed up and they all simultaneously threw themselves at each other. Circumstances that lead to this fight weren't important right now.

They just fought for what they believed in.

The end of time was approaching.

4. Bow and Blade

Outer castle broke down. Rena sensed more buildings collapse as she ran.

Dark Nephilim was so large that walls cracked and ceilings shattered every time it moved and waved its arms. There wouldn't be anything left of the outer castle if this kept up.

"Oh my....."

Rena took a look behind as she ran swiftly then groaned. Dark Nephilim was chasing her while trashing with all of its four legs, each step it took shattered the stone floor.

A future where nothing would be remaining of her awaited if she allowed it to get close to her.

"To think she'd summon such a powerful spirit..... It seems Chloe's speciality wasn't ranged or close combat but this."

Wasn't Dark Nephilim basically a spirit that was called the guardian god of the Dark Elves?

Of course, this wouldn't have been an enjoyable choice for Chloe either. It would mean a great loss for the Dark Elves if it were to get injured or possibly killed.

Rena sighed after gaining a safe distance then pulled her bowstring.

Ping!

Arrow flew in and pelted Dark Nephilim's face. Dark Nephilim screamed and became more enraged as it chased after Rena.

"It won't work here....."

Dark Nephilim was so large that no amount of normal arrows would even make a dent on it. A lot of firepower was needed to finish it off properly..... But it was doubtful if the shaking pillars of the outer castle would be able to withstand such an impact.

She had to escape the outer castle first.

Rena ran all the way back to the hallway then jumped down to the 1st floor in a single leap. People that were passing by made surprised faces. They had been worried about the terrifying sounds coming from upstairs and dust falling down from the ceiling. But now a beautiful Elf suddenly came down from upstairs.

"Everyone get out of here right now!"

"Hmm?"

People that had been whispering amongst themselves couldn't understand Rena's warning and stood blinking in their places.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

But that only lasted for a moment, people's eyes widened after spotting Dark Nephilim coming down shattering the stairs.

"Ah, aahh!!"

"Waaaah!!"

"W, what is that!?"

Civilians that worked and slept on the 1st floor got terrified from Dark Nephilim's appearance and ran away. But Dark Nephilim was still moving too fast. Not only that, but there were still many people who were kneeling down frozen in fear.

Rena wanted to help them up but there was no time. Dark Nephilim was eyeing the people running away. It was such a ferocious spirit that it naturally became hostile to loud screaming and busy movements.

"Here, come this way!"

She had to buy time for the people to escape. When Rena kept firing arrows while dashing away, Dark Nephilim got enraged and charged at her.

Rena quickly ran into a kitchen that was nearby. She had to escape the outer castle soon as possible to defeat Dark Nephilim. But she couldn't use the hallway that was filled with people right now.

Crash!!

Dark Nephilim came in breaking through the kitchen door. It was a wide kitchen for a human but a narrow space for Dark Nephilim. There was nowhere to escape. But Rena kicked up from the kitchen counter then grabbed the hook that was hanging up in the air.

It was a hook for hanging meat.

"Rwaaar!!"

"Woah!"

Rena quickly swung her body as Dark Nephilim jumped up and swiped with its arm. Displaying pendulum like movement, Rena's body shifted to the left as she managed to narrowly dodge Dark Nephilim's arm. Then as Rena's body headed right according to the laws of the pendulum..... she came face to face with Dark Nephilim that was falling after reaching the maximum height of its jump.

“Hello there.”

Rena smiled then kicked Dark Nephilim on the nose. It was a powerful kick that would have knocked out any normal person but it only tickled for Dark Nephilim that could easily take dozens of arrows.

“Grrrrrrrr!!”

But it must have still been angry about it because it frantically shook its head left and right then glared at Rena ferociously. It was grinding its teeth as it glared at Rena who was swinging left and right like a pendulum. She will definitely not get out unscathed if she was caught.

“Alright, what should I do now.....”

Rena could take down Dark Nephilim if she decided to. The problem was doing it here would destroy whatever that was remaining of the outer castle. Judging by the sounds of people running away in the hallway, there were still people that haven’t escaped yet.

“Grrr!! Gwaaaaar!!”

Dark Nephilim must have used its brain because it tried to step on the kitchen counter that Rena used and jump up. But the counter made out of wood couldn’t withstand Dark Nephilim’s weight and got shattered.

After an effort it put some thought into failed and receiving a pain from falling on the floor, Dark Nephilim grinded its teeth as it scowled at Rena. It was literally going to chew her up.

“You wouldn’t understand even if I told you that I didn’t do anything this time right?ugh.”

Rena was smiling bitterly then frowned from a sudden pain. She felt a strange pain on her right hand that was grabbing the cold steel hook.

Creak, creak.

“.....Huh?”

And a strange sound was heard. Rena internally screamed then looked up as the hook started to slowly lower along with a creaking sound effect.

No way, it was a hook used for hanging large animals like cows..... Could it be that Rena was heavier than that?

It was an absurd thought in a dangerous situation like this but Rena seriously felt depressed. It actually couldn’t withstand her weight? Dark Nephilim must have realized the situation Rena was in and was licking its lips waiting for Rena to fall down.

Crack!

“Ah, thank goodness.”

Rena realized why the hook was falling down and let out a sigh of relief. It wasn't that the hook was snapping off, the part that connected the hook's chain from the ceiling was about to break. It must have been damaged from the shock that Dark Nephilim caused upstairs.

Thus, it wasn't particularly because she was heavy!

Rena eased her mind then started to swing back and forth again. After realizing that Rena was trying to escape, Dark Nephilim busily moved its eyes to follow her movements. It was going to jump in soon as Rena landed on the ground then pulverize her.

After busily swinging left and right moving higher and higher, Rena finally let go her hand when she reached the left most highest point, a place where she could fall down on a kitchen counter near the window. Dark Nephilim noticed this and threw its entire body towards the left..... But Rena lightly twisted her body then grabbed the same hook with her left hand this time.

Law of the pendulum, it was a trick utilizing that there was a slight time that pendulum remained on its left and right highest points. Of course, that was just the principle behind the trick. It was still a very dangerous thing to try. Even more so with a blood thirsty beast below.

It was a trick that even an acrobat that walked on ropes and jumped through burning hoops wouldn't dare to mimic. But Rena performed it without much difficulty.

After easily fooling Dark Nephilim, Rena continued to swing down on the pendulum then immediately let go of her hand when she got close to the floor. Rather than distancing herself, it was more important to buy more time so Dark Nephilim couldn't respond accordingly.

Dark Nephilim ran thinking Rena will jump to the left then tried to stop after realizing Rena was gone but it ended up running into the wall.

Craash!!

A huge vibration got spread across the outer castle. The wall cracked then shattered.

“Oh no.....”

Rena who had been watching from the back let out a sympathetic voice. After falling on the floor and now even running straightly into a wall.....Dark Nephilim slowly turned toward Rena.

Its eyes now even held loathing.

It felt as if even if the world was to break down, it wouldn't be satisfied unless it chewed Rena into pieces. Rena waved her hand as she smiled.

“I'd really like it if you quietly gave up and went home.”

Most of the people should have evacuated by now. Otherwise, she just had to exit the outer castle through a window and finish this.

Just when Rena raised her bow to prepare for Dark Nephilim's attack, an unexpected answer was heard.

"One who should give up is you, Elf!"

Shatter!! Chloe riding on a rope came in shattering through the kitchen window and launched a kick. This was such a surprising ambush even for Rena! Rena quickly twisted her body but she had to take the kick on her right shoulder.

Crack!

".....Ugh!"

Rena swallowed her scream then quickly backed out. Rena certainly had outstanding combat skills and was experienced in both ranged and close quarter combat. But her body wasn't built strongly. Rather, you could even say she was a glass cannon.

She could dodge most of the attacks but she received a large damage once she was hit. Rena smiled while pressing down on her right shoulder that was throbbing in pain.

"Hello, Chloe. Did you follow me here?"

"I didn't come here to talk of course. I'm here for your life."

Chloe sent Dark Nephilim an eye gesture then suddenly grabbed a kitchen knife on the counter and charged at Rena. Rena quickly grabbed the steel plate beside her and blocked with it.

Kitchen knife that Chloe stabbed with all her strength stopped after getting stuck in the plate half way.

"Hmph!"

Chloe gave up the kitchen knife then launched a high kick right away. Rena blocked with the almost shattered plate but its durability must have run out and got shattered into pieces.

While Rena backed out from getting her defensive tool broken, Chloe grabbed a butcher knife then charged in.

It wasn't even a warm up exercise for a skilled Dark Elf warrior like Chloe to turn a person into a minced meat with a butcher knife.

"Chloe!"

Rena quickly stepped back to dodge the knife getting swiped horizontally. There was no moment to rest due to Chloe continuing to mix kicks and knife attacks.

“That’s enough! This isn’t the time for this! You calling out Dark Nephilim put other people in danger too!”

“So what, Elf? We’re invaders! It was stranger for us to be nice to them!”

Seeing Rena run away by distancing herself, Chloe immediately threw the butcher knife at her. Rena hit away the knife rotating in mid air flying toward her with her bow. But the next knife flew towards her.

It wasn’t just the knives. Forks, plates, it was as if she was going to throw everything on the kitchen counter at her.

“.....”

Rena grimaced as she dodged some objects and hit others away with her bow. Until now she hadn’t used lethal attacks on Chloe because she was thinking about the future, and also because of their friendship. But the story was different now that other citizens were caught up in the danger as well.

Rena glared angrily at Chloe after hitting away the final knives thrown by Chloe. Rena’s arrow was faster than Chloe who ran out of things to throw coming close up to attack her.

When Rena with her back against the wall fixed her arrow, Chloe made a satisfactory smile.

“How foolish, Elf.”

Gwoooooo. A chill went down Rena’s spine as she was about to fire an arrow. She hadn’t put too much thought into it because Dark Nephilim was obediently staying back after Chloe had appeared..... But why did Chloe give such an order?

Rena would have certainly been in danger if Chloe and Dark Nephilim attacked her together. But that meant.....

Rena’s eyes widened from the enormous energy gathered in Dark Nephilim’s mouth.

Gwoooo!!

Velder Liberation army that just entered Velder and was heading to the outer castle saw a beam of light flying diagonally towards the sky then stopped their steps.

“Just what is that.....?”

“Sir Penensio, let’s evacuate the citizens first!!”

Vanessa shouted urgently after seeing the citizens running out of the outer castle screaming. Penensio was about to give his order but looked up towards the sky from sensing a sudden presence then drew his sword.

Crash!!

With a sound of an explosion, Glitter soldiers fell down from the rooftop. Vanessa groaned when not just one or two, but almost 300 Glitter soldiers stood in their way.

“Could it be that it was a trap?”

“It doesn’t matter. There’s nowhere to run now that we’ve come in.”

There was nowhere to run once you entered because of the special barrier over Velder. Thus, soon as they had put their plan into motion, it was either win or be annihilated for the Velder Liberation Army.

Velder Liberation Army knew this but had entered willingly. Penensio smiled bitterly from this situation with no retreat then looked back at his troops. Velder Knights battle hardened from their fight in Hamel were looking at their new enemies with stiff expressions.

“Victory or death.....”

Vanessa also sighed then fixed her glasses.

“There’s no other way, let’s fight while trying to minimize the damage taken to our troops. We’ll win long as the El Search Party achieves their goal inside the inner castle.....”

“Then let’s try to survive.”

Penensio held up his sword and Vanessa also drew her weapon. Then all the troops drew their weapons as well. Glitter soldiers started running at them with McGard the Blitzkrieg as their vanguard.

Fight for survival started.

Her arm hurt.

Rena was standing in the outer castle’s garden panting and trying to catch her breath. A giant hole had been created on the outer castle’s wall in front of her. Chloe made a cruel smile as she exited through the hole.

“You barely got out alive.”

“.....It was quite a good attack, Chloe.”

Rena hasn't allowed too many direct hits so far. But her right arm was now covered in blood. Actually, she should have died from that perfect ambush.....

Chloe was astonished by Rena's reflexes but still snorted.

"You won't be able to use your bow anymore with your right arm hurt like that."

"Do you really think so?"

As Rena and Chloe exchanged words, Dark Nephilim slowly walked out through the broken wall. Chloe proudly stroked Dark Nephilim's chin then suddenly turned her head towards another direction.

"I hear fighting. It seems Glitter soldiers were deployed."

".....Yes, do you want to change your mind now? I don't want to take down Dark Nephilim too much."

Chloe laughed at Rena's calm request. No matter how strong Rena was, there was no way she could handle her bow properly with her right arm damaged like that. Maybe she could fire 1 or 2 more shots if she forced herself? Dark Nephilim would never be defeated with just those.

"You are the one who should surrender. If you do, I'll ask D to at least spare your life."

".....Just who is this D that got you so terrified?"

"....."

Chloe face turned dark for a moment but she shook her head right away. There was no point in talking anymore.

"If you won't surrender.....then there's only death."

Just when Chloe was getting Dark Nephilim to prepare another Dark Gravity Cannon, Rena suddenly dashed in. Rena who specialized in ranged combat closed the distance?

Chloe doubted her eyes as Rena dashed in. Dark Nephilim quickly attacked with its teeth but Rena dodged easily by sliding and slipping under Dark Nephilim's belly.

"You're aiming for the stomach? It's no use!"

Chloe quickly made Dark Nephilim dodge. The arrow Rena fired barely missed Dark Nephilim and flew towards the sky. After looking up at the arrow that had been aiming for Dark Nephilim's stomach fly up towards the air, Chloe made a satisfactory smile then turned her gaze back towards the ground.

Rena was panting while barely standing up. Her arm was drenched in blood due to her pulling the bowstring with it.

It was a tragic scene as if the beautiful flower's stem was revealing its white innards after getting brutally torn apart.

And the beast that will snap the flower off was bearing its teeth. Perfectly unharmed Dark Nephilim was growling as it glared at Rena. It wanted to unleash its pent up rage.

Chloe noticed Dark Nephilim's rage and spoke.

"It's all over now right?"

"Yes, it's over."

Rena's calm voice. Chloe instinctively realized something was wrong.

That Elf was strange. But she couldn't possibly act this confident after her last ditch effort had failed.

It was as if.....

"Chloe would have made it dodge if I just fired it directly."

Rena murmured as she held up her still unharmed left arm. Chloe's eyes widened after seeing Rena's finger rise up towards the clear afternoon sky. Something was wrong.

But Rena's shout came faster than Chloe's order to Dark Nephilim.

"Gungnir!!"

At Rena's shout, rain started falling from the clear sky. It wasn't a normal downpour. Dozens, hundreds of spears fell from the sky!

Dark Nephilim tried its best to dodge the hundreds of spears falling like the divine punishment.....but area of the attack was too wide.

"Gwaaaaaagh!!"

Dark Nephilim screamed and twisted its body as it instantly became like the porcupine from getting pierced by the spears.

If it was one or two spears, it could withstand them then regenerate. But regeneration or whatever didn't matter if it got pierced by hundreds of spears in such a short time.

Gungnir, Rena's skill that wiped out an entire area with hundreds of magical spears. This ultimate skill held a terrifying power but Rena barely used it because other people might get caught up in it.

Seeing that Dark Nephilim was still breathing thinly after getting hit by Gungnir, Rena fixed her arrow without hesitation.

“I’m sorry, good night.”

Arrow flew with a short farewell then got stuck in Dark Nephilim’s face. Dark Nephilim let out a long scream as it fell to the side.

Thud!!

Rena turned around after firing the arrow. Sound of a huge beast falling down was heard behind her. Rena calmly stared at Chloe as she spoke.

“Alright, Chloe. Surrender now.”

“.....You’re insane.”

That was all Chloe could say after being so astonished from witnessing Gungnir. She had known that Rena was strong, and also knew that she was going easy on her, but she didn’t know it was up to this extent.

Even Chloe who was a demon general didn’t have any talent to withstand such an attack. Rather, you had to say Chloe was chosen as a demon general because of her ability to summon Dark Nephilim.

But to take down that Dark Nephilim with a single skill?

What Chloe felt from the scene of Dark Elves’ guardian god falling in front of her wasn’t horror, fear or anger. It was just absent-mindedness. She couldn’t think about anything due to the overwhelming skill difference between Rena and her.

“Why are you asking me when you are this powerful? Can’t you just cut off my limbs then force me listen to you?”

“Things you say.....”

Rena made a pretty frown but Chloe was serious. Rena’s arm looked like it couldn’t draw the bowstring anymore..... But Chloe still wouldn’t be able to beat Rena.

“What do you mean? Shouldn’t you do that?”

“Who would do such a thing to a friend?”

“.....”

Chloe blinked couple times from confusion. Did this Elf lose her mind as well after losing some blood? No, she did use that word couple times before. But was she still calling her that after all of this?

“F, friend? Who? Who is?”

“Aren’t Chloe and I friends?”

“Don’t make me laugh! Who would become friends with an Elf?”

“But we bathed and even drank together.”

Rena asked with a confused expression. Chloe raised her voice.

“You and I are enemies! We’re just enemies!!”

“Then we can become friends from now on.”

Chloe beat her chest from frustration. Rena looked down at her right hand then frowned.

“Owowow..... It was too much to fire arrows with this hand after all.”

“.....What?”

“The cut Chloe gave me last time still haven’t healed completely.”

Rena approached and held out her right hand to show Chloe. Chloe saw Rena’s right hand then frowned.

“But we treated that with a potion!”

“It’s only been a day.”

“.....”

Wait, so she defeated the Dark Elf warriors, Chloe and Dark Nephilim with an injured hand? Chloe was desperately hanging on to her sanity by grabbing her head when Rena spoke with a gentle voice.

“It seems I can’t fight anymore with this hand. So Chloe, you go and help the Velder Liberation Army.”

“.....Are you crazy?”

“I got hurt like this while fighting Chloe. So can you help me out?”

Rena put her left hand on Chloe’s shoulder then begged seriously.

“Please, Chloe.”

“.....”

She was going to go crazy. Is this how it felt for a rabbit to get asked a favor from a lion? Chloe bit her lower lips then sighed.

“You’re crazy. You’re seriously crazy. You’re insane. What kind of Elf asks a favor from a Dark Elf?”

“There are lot of elves that asks a favor from a friend.”

Chloe’s face turned red when Rena spoke with a serene smile.

What should she say.....? She was embarrassed.

There were reasons, but Chloe broke her promise with Rena and ambushed her. But Rena fought back while being careful so that no one was killed and was even careful so Chloe wasn’t harmed. Even her fight against Dark Nephilim in the end, she could have taken Dark Nephilim out any time she wanted but held back due to the surrounding circumstances.

Chloe had been just playing on top of her opponent’s hand. After all of this, she should surrender, wave the white flag. But even though Chloe admitted her defeat.....Rena was calling Chloe her friend and was asking her for a favor.

“.....You’re seriously crazy.”

“I may be.”

If Rena had ordered her, if she had tried to force her, Chloe would have rather died than to submit. Even now, she had a strong feeling of just wishing Rena would kill her cleanly. Dying to a powerful foe was an ending warriors could accept.

“And you’re making me crazy too.....”

If people that were stronger showed their generosity, it was duty of those who were weaker to accept it. This rule Chloe had always kept as a warrior moved her heart.

“What should I do?”

“You’ll listen to me?”

Chloe frowned when Rena smiled joyfully.

“I would have lost this life to you anyways. You let me live so I’ll follow what you say.”

“Then please help the Velder Liberation Army together with the Dark Elves. This is something I should have done but.....”

But Rena didn't have any strength left to draw her bowstring. Looking at Rena's injury, Chloe was about to nod then her face stiffened. Rena also turned around to look towards the direction Chloe was looking then her eyes widened in horror.

Dark Nephilim that had certainly fallen was slowly getting up.

Hundreds of magical spears stabbed into its body slowly got pushed out as its regenerative ability activated. Dark Nephilim was indeed a powerful spirit.... But the intuition that Rena had built up over the course of countless battles had told her that she certainly took it down.

Rena suspected if it was Dark Nephilim's special ability but judging by Chloe's abhorred expression, that wasn't it either.

"Could it be, D.....?"

"Chloe, go ahead quickly."

Rena pushed Chloe who was pale and frozen. Chloe got pushed away couple steps then stared at Rena in confusion. But Rena was only looking towards Dark Nephilim that was standing up again.

It was a very serious expression that Rena hadn't shown before.

"Believe that we will win and help the Velder Liberation Army. But if we lose, say that you had no choice because I threatened you then go back to the demons."

".....What?"

"Go quickly. I'll take care of here."

Rena's dry words, Chloe's face stiffened from sensing that Rena was saying that while being prepared for death.

Chloe ordered Dark Nephilim that was standing back up inside her head but it was no use. Dark Nephilim that should have absolutely followed its summoner's orders wasn't even giving a glance at Chloe now.

Let's trust Rena for now. As Chloe backed away, Rena took a deep breath.

"Phew....."

Beast she had certainly taken down got back up completely healthy again. You could tell with a single glance that it wasn't because of Chloe or Dark Nephilim's powers.

That D who Chloe was so afraid of must have had a hand in this.

This wasn't an easy battle under normal circumstances and she was even injured now. She couldn't draw her bowstring.

But she couldn't run away. If Rena ran away from here, Dark Nephilim will pulverize the Velder Liberation Army. Or bare its fangs against the other Search Party members.

"Everyone, do your best."

Rena calmly cheered on her comrades that were fighting their hardest somewhere else then kicked the ground.

She couldn't use her arm but she still had her legs. Her enemy was right in front of her.

Even if her life was in danger, she had no choice but to fight.

Add's steps stopped when he came up the stone stairs with his hand joined with Eve's. A giant steel door was blocking their way.

"There's no lock. Shall we destroy it?"

"Wait, let me analyze it."

He was still holding on to Eve's hand so he only had one free hand. Add tried knocking on the door, scanning with the Dynamo and tried everything else he could but still couldn't figure out a single thing.

".....How does this even make sense?"

A chill went down Add's spine from this conclusion. There were things that Add's Dynamo couldn't destroy but it was impossible that a thing that Dynamo couldn't analyze could exist. Dynamo was even able to analyze how a space-time drift phenomenon was occurring in this inner castle.

But this door was impossible to analyze. Thus, it meant that this door was a space made from something surpassing Add's knowledge or something that couldn't be read by Dynamo's scans, something that surpassed space distortion.

While Add was at a loss for words, Eve pointed with her finger.

"Here's a strange slate. It looks like a door knob."

Some kind of slate was attached to the part where there should have been a door knob. This part couldn't be analyzed either. Add confirmed it with his eyes then murmured.

"There are 9 slots."

There were 9 gems embedded on the slate around in a circle. Starting from the 12 o'clock, gems were lined up in the order of red, purple, green, grey, pink, blue, orange, red and purple. Add was

pondering if there was a special meaning behind the color of the gems when Eve spoke composedly from beside him.

“They are El.”

“.....I know.”

The realization had come a bit late because Add was so surprised by this gate’s existence. He thoroughly prepared himself then tried firing a Void Impact at the door..... But nothing happened.

Activation of the skill itself was ignored.

“There’s a space distortion casted on it.... But I can’t decipher it.”

“Is this the throne room where they’re turning El into a Dark El?”

“There were no crossroads on our way here.”

Add’s answer wasn’t a proper one but it was showing the two’s situation right now.

They had to go through this gate but they couldn’t.

“Considering how they sealed it off with something I suspect to be a space distortion.... It doesn’t look like any normal door.”

“What demon could have turned the inner castle like this?”

“.....I’m not sure.”

It was an abrupt question but Add delved into his thoughts seriously. Elesis was powerful but she didn’t seem knowledgeable about space related abilities. Ran’s main skills were composed of shadows, Helputt was unknown but he was probably similar to Chung and Chloe didn’t look like she had much power.

By the rule of elimination, only Karis remained. She did seem to have some space related abilities but it didn’t seem like her abilities were great enough to create this gate so powerful that Add couldn’t analyze.

Add made a reluctant conclusion.

“Is it the court magician Aisha?”

“She helped us. I don’t think she would create a trap like this.”

“You never know. It could be an emergency security system she kept hidden inside the castle.”

Add knew very well that he wasn't making sense. No matter how powerful of a magician Aisha was, there was no way she could easily create a gate even Add couldn't decipher. She also had no reason to secretly hide this gate inside the Velder royal castle.

"Those nine El....why do you think they are there?"

Eve was looking straightly at the pink El. Add took out the Memory of Time and Space from his pocket and compared with the one on the slate.

There was no point in analyzing. He could tell just with his eyes that they were same.

"....."

"They are not unrelated. The reason Aisha helped us, but why she didn't actively help us... It seems like all of those reasons are right here."

Eve spoke all the words Add wanted to say. Add nodded then carefully stroked the slate with his hand. He was worried about being electrocuted or any other strange traps but the slate just felt cold on his hand.

They couldn't figure out anything after examining for a while. Add was clicking his tongue from feeling impatient when Eve went to sit near the stairs using Reby and Moby as chairs.

"Let's stay seated."

"Is this the time for that?"

Add unconsciously spoke sarcastically. They didn't know where Ara and Chung went and Rena and Elsword must be fighting for their lives. But Add and Eve were blocked by a strange gate and couldn't proceed.

"If there's no progress even after examining this much, then it's important to rest and recover our stamina. It doesn't matter for me but you are tired."

"....."

Well it was true that Add was quite tired from coming up the stairs. He would have normally flown using the Dynamos but he needed to be careful due to the wide area space distortion around this place.

They didn't know what might happen later so he did need to rest. Add admitted Eve was right then sat beside Eve using Dynamos as a chair while suppressing his impatient feelings.

Eve was staring at the slate.

"Why are there nine of them?"

“I don’t know, but there must be a reason.”

“The one Ara got was orange, Elsword’s was red and yours was purple.”

Just like Eve said, they were all colors that existed on the slate. After all of this, it would be stranger if the Memory of Time and Spaces that Aisha gave them weren’t related to this.

“It seems we’ll have to conclude that the one who created this slate is Aisha or someone related to her.”

“Probably.”

Add was suppressing his restlessness when Eve grabbed his hand after looking like she had almost forgotten.

“.....”

Huh? He knew in his head that her action didn’t mean anything.... As Add who lost his sense of judgement blinked, Eve replied prudishly.

“This is a strange place. We have to be careful to not be separated.”

“O, okay.....”

Add spoke out something in between a groan and an answer then shut his mouth.

Everyone was fighting with their lives on the line but they were blocked off. Add would have normally thought up various methods in order to break through this situation. Add’s way of doing things was to challenge persistently, and if there was no other way, he wouldn’t hesitate to even resort to unsafe methods.

But all those feelings evaporated the moment Eve grabbed his hand. Feeling of only wishing this time to last a bit longer remained.

“.....”

This was a time that will end soon. Soon as this task was over, it was an eternal farewell with the El Search Party that he had cultivated up till now.

Add made an empty laugh. Eve seemed slightly surprised by this.

“So.... you can laugh like that too.”

“I didn’t laugh.”

Eve was looking straightly at him wanting to say something but then closed her mouth discretely. Add knew this but didn’t say anything.

But he didn't let go of her hand.

Because this will be the last time as well.

She couldn't move.

“.....Ah”

Rena panted while pressing down on the ground with her still somewhat fine left arm. She wasn't a physical combat specialist. Even if she had to fight close up, she used a method of dodging and aiming her kicks at enemy's joints.

Rena's archery skills were nearly divine but her body was still made out of blood and flesh.

Of course, she was still better than Add who had stamina and endurance of a normal person, no, possibly less stamina and endurance than a normal person. But she fell behind compared to Elsword and Ara who were close quarter combat specialists. And there was no way her defenses were stronger than Eve who was a Nasod..... So her defensive ability was second to last amongst the group.

And Dark Nephilim was charging at Rena who had the second to last defensive ability.

“Phew, this is difficult.”

Rena pressed on the ground with her left hand to launch herself up then lightly grabbed Dark Nephilim's head. She made an exquisite use of her arm strength, inertia and flexibility to rise up vertically then smashed down on Dark Nephilim's back with her knee as she fell.

Crack!

She had just performed a parade of acrobatic attacks with just one arm but still couldn't avoid falling off Dark Nephilim's back right after. After falling off, Rena rolled on the ground and couldn't get up. She panted heavily as she looked at Dark Nephilim.

Dark Nephilim that just charged noticed Rena had dodged and was slowly turning around towards Rena. It didn't have any rage filled expression like before.

“It almost seems like a machine without thoughts.....”

Did its insides change into Nasod during that slight moment when she wasn't looking? Eve would have been quite offended and retorted back if she had heard this.

Rena unconsciously imagined that scene and chuckled.

It was a comfortable laugh even though she couldn't get up because she forced herself to move with two legs that were covered in blood. These were injuries she received because she went into round 2 without knowing how Dark Nephilim had changed.

There won't be any problem if she recuperated properly. She somehow managed to avoid her nerves from being damaged after all. Of course, there was still an enormous pain flowing in from the wounds. She had no excuses if she became permanently disabled from continuing to fight like this.

Actually, her continuing to tie down Dark Nephilim with parades of acrobatics right now was basically continuing to inflict harm onto herself.

She was barely holding on somehow because..... Dark Nephilim had lost its cognitive abilities.

“.....Should I ask Chloe for help?”

Rena smiled vaguely as she saw Dark Nephilim stomping its feet again to charge. Chloe and the Dark Elf squad went to help the Velder Liberation Army so they won't return.

Add and the other Search party members also must be fighting somewhere else. It was pointless to hope for them coming to help her.

“What should I do.....?”

Rena tried to think of a solution but the answer was always the same. Rena's knee smash just now.....would have instantly broken the spines of any normal beasts.

Of course, Dark Nephilim was a powerful spirit. It even had an ability to regenerate. But the reason Rena's two legs were beaten up wasn't because she hadn't known about Dark Nephilim's regenerative abilities.

Dark Nephilim right now couldn't get injured. It wasn't that Rena's attacks weren't doing damage..... All injuries it received were regenerating instantly soon as it was damaged.

It almost felt as if she was kicking the surface of water. There were impacts and signs of damage but they held no meaning.

Dark Nephilim was acting like it wasn't afraid of getting injured as if it knew this trait. The strategy it was using wasn't trading blow to blow..... It was trading nothing for a chance to chomp down on its opponent.

This wasn't a strategy that any normal creature existing in nature could utilize. That was the reason why even skilled Rena was pushed back and ended up like this.

“Haah.....”

Would things have changed if her arms and legs were still fine? Well, it would have been less precarious than now but she wasn't confident that she could have taken it down.

Wasn't it a monster that got back up even after getting hit directly by Gungnir?

“.....Monster huh.”

Rena pressed on the ground with her left hand then threw her body towards Dark Nephilim. She confirmed that she couldn't deal meaningful damage to it anyways, so she jumped over it.

She wanted to take it down if possible. But that was impossible. Then she had to make it her goal to keep it in place long as possible. How could someone else handle this beast that even she couldn't handle?

Rena made her decision and was turning around....when Dark Nephilim kicked up on the ground. Rena face froze as she was putting strength into her left arm to throw herself forward again. Dark Nephilim was jumping up.

It was trying to crush her with its body.

“Wha.....”

It had been acting like a thoughtless monster until now. But it suddenly changed its strategy. Rena got startled and quickly threw her body sideways to dodge. But shifting her weight so suddenly put burden on her body. Trying to dodge only using her left arm when she couldn't even get up properly was already an absurd acrobatic feat.

Bam!!

Even while screaming from a shock that smashed into her waist, Rena realized what had just happened. She had no choice but to prioritize dodging to the side, so she had been in no position to prepare for its next attack.

“.....Kugh.”

Rena's body rolled across the outer castle's garden after getting tackled by Dark Nephilim. The shock was nearly 3 times more than getting hit by a horse running at full speed.

“Ah, it broke.....”

She ended up giving her left arm to protect her waist. Of course, that didn't mean her waist wasn't hurt..... she was certain that her ribs just cracked.

Right arm? It definitely couldn't be used today and she wouldn't be in this situation if she could use her two legs.

To sum it up, she was only bearing injuries that wouldn't make it a surprise if she was to drop dead right now. Rena was still alive because her movements were way too swift and she minimized the damage with her reflexes if she was about to get hit..... But she now completely lost all offensive abilities.

“Haah.....”

Rena still managed to slowly raise her body with her hand dripping with blood. Her legs wouldn't listen to her so all she could manage was to kneel with one knee.

Dark Nephilim was quietly staring at Rena. It was as if it was waiting for someone's order.

While Rena was looking at Dark Nephilim that was standing still, a blood traveling along Rena's lips dropped on the ground. Rena saw the green grass getting dyed in red and realized that everything was over.

“Ah.....”

I'm going to die here. It's not like I don't have any regrets or lingering attachments..... But worry came before this thought.

What will happen to the other kids if I go down here? What if they are in more dangerous situation against even more powerful foes?

“Hmm.....”

Worrying about such things when she was about to die right now? Even Rena thought it was a bit strange but it couldn't be helped.

It wasn't that her own life wasn't precious. Of course it was precious..... But wasn't it obvious to be worried about people she had been together with?

And worrying about the person she couldn't do anything for even though they had been together.

“I'm sorry.....”

Soon as Rena sighed then closed her eyes, Dark Nephilim charged in as if that was a signal. Sounds of it stomping across the ground to end her life came closer.

Last face that came into Rena's mind as she prepared for the end was.....

Slaaash!!

Sound of space getting torn apart rang out through the air. But there was no pain that she had prepared for. When she slightly opened the eyes she had tightly shut..... dust cloud was blowing by.

And the white clothing waving amidst the dust clouds.

Blade that was slashed down heavily was precisely cutting Dark Nephilim in half.

Energy behind the utmost extreme bladework ignored the regeneration ability or whatever else and cut Dark Nephilim down in a single strike.

Thud!!

As Dark Nephilim fell over after getting sliced in half, the man slowly withdrew his blade. His stance made him look like a veteran who's been through countless ferocious battles, but not a single piece of his clothing looked worn out.

It wasn't that his clothing hasn't worn out. He wasn't someone who fought like that. Rena had mended it every time it was worn out.

"I'm sorry. I made you wait too long."

The man who wasn't showing his face spoke. Rena slowly shook her head.

"We decided not to apologize to each other."

"I'll be careful next time, Rena."

Rena made a helpless laugh at what he said. Joy from this unexpected reunion only lasted for a moment. Rena quickly came to her senses and requested.

"I'm fine now so can you please go help other places?"

"You don't have to worry."

The man said this and didn't move. He was looking only forwards like a statue and didn't say anything. But Rena soon realized what he meant.

Airship broke out of the clouds and was approaching Velder. Rena looked closely to see familiar faces on the airship.

".....They are Black Crow."

Rena didn't know what to say at these unexpected reinforcements. Of course, Black Crow was a group that was highly trained for combat. They should obviously welcome their help with open arms..... But wasn't this a past that this man abandoned?

"It's something that I decided for myself."

The man spoke stiffly as if he read Rena's thoughts. But Rena knew that those words weren't light. Rena unconsciously looked at the man's left arm, a cold mechanical arm then swallowed her sigh.

You couldn't speak carelessly towards someone with such a large wound. You might hurt them unintentionally.

The man confirmed the Black Crow members dropping from the airship then turned around as he took off his coat. He then put his coat around Rena who was covered in blood with injuries on her arms and legs.

Rena sent him a gaze of thanks then was about to nod but paused. The man was looking at her with an ever so sad expression.

“I’m sorry, Rena. I shouldn’t have been here right now. But there was no other way this time as well.”

“.....What do you mean?”

Wasn’t everything going to turn out well because this man managed to arrive? But there was an unknown rage and bitterness on the man’s face as he bit down on his teeth tightly.

“No matter what happens, I’ll at least.....you”

“Raven?”

Soon as Rena realized something was off and called out the man’s name, he held Rena up with his arms. Before Rena said anything in response, her body felt like it was getting lifted up as her sight started getting blurry.

Elsword and Elesis’s fight with sparks flying about suddenly stopped. Elesis had suddenly stopped her sword and was looking far off into the distance.

Elsword who had been fighting joyfully stared strangely.

“Big Sister? What’s wrong?”

“.....Raven ended up coming back to Velder.”

Elesis shook her head bitterly. It was such a bitter tone unfit for the intense fight they’ve been having until now. Elsword instinctively realized something was wrong but he couldn’t figure out what was wrong exactly.

“Big Brother Raven is here? But why is that.....”

“I’m sorry, Elsword. But our fight.....ends here.”

Elsword sensed danger and held up his sword from Elesis’s regrettable words but it was too late. With the feeling of his body getting strongly pressed down, his vision started getting twisted.

“Kugh, uuugh!”

“Don’t worry. I’m also coming with you.”

Elesis said quietly while looking at Elsword ever so tenderly. With a face saying she’ll go together with him wherever he goes from now on.

With a face filled with resignation and despair.

Spear and blade, cannon and armor collided against each other. Then Ran suddenly swiped his blade horizontally to push Ara back then backed out a long distance.

“Crow has returned.”

“So he ended up coming. That final man.”

Helputt also pushed Chung back with a furious attack then backed out himself to exchange words with Ran. At this sudden ceasefire, Ara and Chung also stopped their attacks and stared at the two men.

“Elder Brother?”

“.....Just what’s going on, father?”

“The truth that you guys need to know, and despair.”

Soon as Ran’s words ended, Ara and Chung’s visions started getting twisted.

Add realized he was standing the moment he came to his senses. He had been certainly sitting near the stairs holding Eve’s hand but he was now standing in a place he had never seen before.

“Wha.....”

Forced teleport? Add felt the chills and quickly looked beside him. Eve was looking forwards with a cool expression.

“This seems to be the throne room.”

“This is the place where they are turning El into Dark El?”

Just like Eve said, there was a very long carpet and stairs in the front. Add looked around and saw that the throne room was completely empty. No one else was here.

There was a large curtain placed around the location where the throne should have been. Inside of the curtain couldn’t be seen very well.

But there was a vague silhouette as if someone was sitting on the throne. Add trying to focus on this silhouette when his surroundings shook then voices were heard.

“Where is this place?”

“Big Sister!!”

“Where’s.....”

Familiar voices, Add turned to see that Elsword, Chung and Ara had appeared beside him. Then after a moment later, Rena and a man carrying her appeared.

“Big Brother Raven? You’re really here!!”

Elsword noticed and rejoiced. Raven wordlessly nodded. Add’s eyes turned back forwards. Sudden large scale teleport, Aisha had displayed this before.....but he had a bad feeling about this for some reason.

“Kiyahahaha! So the fools are gathered.”

Dimension gate opened in midair then Karis jumped out while laughing. It wasn’t just her.....a teleport phenomenon occurred in front of the El Search Party. Then Ran, Helputt and finally Elesis appeared.

“.....So it’s a final decisive battle.”

The El Search Party instinctively grabbed their weapons when Add spoke quietly.

There wasn’t any explanation but everyone understood the current situation. They didn’t know why the party members that were fighting in various places suddenly gathered, but that didn’t matter.

How many or how powerful their enemies were didn’t matter. They were the El Search Party.

“Alright! I’ll go in first!”

“Wait, Elsword. Rena looks injured.”

“Hey, Raven. You fight instead of Rena.”

Add spoke to Raven daringly. Add actually didn’t know too much about Raven but he knew that Raven held incredible skills.

They had a chance for victory now that Raven joined back up.

The El Search Party all stared at Raven and Rena with a single mind. As everyone’s gazes gathered on them, Rena who was being carried by Raven got startled and whispered quietly.

“Raven, can you let me.....”

Rena asked as if being carried was embarrassing. But Raven didn’t listen to her and started moving.

Everyone stared blankly at Raven’s back as he walked towards Elesis, Ran and Helputt with Rena still in his arms.

“.....”

Soon as Rena's face turned pale after realizing something, Raven turned around.

Raven put Rena down then held her with his Nasod left arm while holding his blade with his human right arm.

"I'll cut down anyone that comes close."

"....."

No one in the El Search Party could open their mouths. Of course, they didn't have that much deep relationship with Raven. Actually, Elsword, Ara and Add had only met and talked with Raven for a day.

"M, Mr.Raven?! Why are you standing on the side of the demons?"

"Big Brother Raven! What are you doing?!"

Elsword and Ara burst out in anger from an emotion that surpassed their relationship with Raven. They didn't know Raven but they knew Rena. Everyone knew how strongly Rena trusted Raven.

Rena blinked widely then tried to say something. But before she did, the tip of Raven's hand pressed on Rena's forehead lightly..... Rena tottered then closed her eyes as she fell unconscious.

".....Why?"

Raven momentarily made a painful expression from the word Rena left before she fell asleep. But he bit his lips in the end then turned his eyes towards the El Search Party.

He held Rena with one hand and held his blade with another. What this meant was.....

".....Raven is our enemy."

Add who was clenching his teeth put an end to the group's confusion. He had no idea what happened but Raven joined their enemies and Rena became a hostage.

It wasn't just him. Ran, Karis, Helputt.....and Elesis were also still standing.

"Elsword, are you ready?"

"Of course!"

But they still had Elsword who succeeded in awakening the Memory of Time and Space on their side. Elsword answered reliably as he stepped up front. Eve and Ara followed after him and took their positions. Chung also prepared to assist.

Add tightly gasped the El in his pocket and enflamed his will to fight.

There was nowhere to run anyways. This was the time to stake everything and fight.



“Kiyahahahaha!! Fight? Fight against us? No, it’s already all over. You guys lost.”

Karis laughed. Ran replied depressingly.

“Everything is over now.”

“It’s now moment for the time to end.”

Helputt continued. Elesis sorrowfully finished.

“Everything ended.”

“.....”

Why were they talking about same things as if they had planned beforehand? Not only that, they were declaring their victory but none of them except Karis looked joyful at all.

They cried out in grief and dismay as they despaired.

“King of time has arrived!!”

Add who couldn’t understand the reaction of the demons and humans that stood on their side..... suddenly opened his eyes widely.

Ba-dump.

His body was relaying to him faster than thinking with his head.

A strange heartbeat that he had forgotten at some point, Add got attracted to it and looked up towards the air between allies and foes. Add looked, Eve also looked, Elsword looked, Ara looked and Chung looked.

Everyone was looking up towards the air.

Space twisted. As if it was being squeezed, it was twisting and shaking as if someone was clenching the space with their hand.

“What.....?”

Add’s heart beat rapidly from an ominous feeling. Did Aisha come to help? No, it wasn’t something like that. Add stared at the rupture in space while shivering from the sense wanting to throw up.

Why.....didn’t he think about the final variable?

It's strange. It's totally strange. Come to think of it, Add had worried and agonized so much about turning this Velder Liberation mission into a success. But there was a name that he hadn't thought about even once through all of this.

D.

The person that tenaciously tried to destroy Eve. The person that was mentioned infrequently amongst the demons. If the battle in Velder was a final decisive showdown, then he should have obviously prepared to fight against this foe as well.

But he didn't. He hadn't thought about it. He didn't think about that part. He purposely cut off that line of thought as if he shouldn't think about it.

He stopped thinking about it after some point.

“Ah.....”

Something came up his throat. As Add kept suppressing his scream, the El Search Party all looked at him worriedly. But Add couldn't avert his eyes from the rupture in space.

Why, just why..... Just when did he stop thinking about D?

Add had always prepared by coming up with an elaborate plan. But he didn't even consider D. This didn't make sense.

It didn't make sense but it actually happened. Why did it happen?

The answer was simple. It was the opposite of how he knew the names and abilities of the demons he met for the first time. How he knew things he shouldn't have. He wanted to ignore something he already knew.

He didn't want to think about it.

Because that was.....

Crash!!

Space shattered then answer to Add's question appeared. It appeared by breaking through the space and finally showed itself to the world. While everyone was in middle of being appalled and stared at the waving light purple hair.....Add screamed.

“A.....”

That was **Downfall**

That was **Destruction**

That was **Despair**

That was **Darkness**

That was **Death**

That was **Destiny**

“AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!”

Why did he fail for more than 20 million times? Who thwarted him? Who plotted all of this? Who tried to destroy Eve? Who tried to wipe out the El Serch Party from this world?

Who created this broken world, this **Dystopia**?

Who committed all of these sins? The answer appeared before their eyes.

That was the devil, **Diablo!!!**



“It’s time to end it.”

The devil smiled.

5. ADD ZERO

The devil descended to the ground.

Both enemies and allies couldn't take their eyes off his appearance. All of the enemies except Karis were looking away from the devil as if he didn't exist, as if they lost their will to fight.

And all of the allies were looking back and forth between Add and the devil.

"No, no!! no!!!"

Add who instinctively understood everything lost his mind and could only repeat those words. He absolutely couldn't believe this.

Why was that devil's face the same as his?

His intuition was telling him that this wasn't just someone who looked similar.

That devil was..... him!! That's the only thing this boiling rage and despair could explain.

"He looks exactly the same as.....Big Brother Add."

"What's going on?"

Eve and Elsword asked as if they couldn't understand. Of course they couldn't understand! Even Add couldn't understand it himself!

".....Maybe they are twins?"

Ara trailed her words with a very unconfident tone. Add couldn't say anything in response because he was trying to suppress himself from throwing up and crying out.

While everyone kept silent, devil closed his eyes then hummed. Devil even yawned after cracking his neck left and right then lightly snapped his finger.

Snap!

Quiet but clear sound rang out amidst the silence. But the effect that followed wasn't small.

"Kuugh?!"

"Uuuugh....."

"Ahh!!"

“Kuagh!”

All of the El Search Party knelt down from the sudden gravity that pressed down on their heads. They hadn’t done anything but their bodies suddenly felt heavy and made it extremely difficult to breathe. Add who was solely free from this phenomena finally came to his senses from the screams coming from around him. He looked forwards.

“Did you just.....?”

“Is that all you have to say?”

Devil’s voice sounded way too sweet. Add shivered from realizing that devil’s voice was familiar and yet not familiar at the same time. He didn’t want to admit it but it was like hearing his own voice coming from someone else’s throat.

“B, big brother Add!!”

This wasn’t the time to lose his mind! Add came to his senses from everyone else’s screams and instantly fired a Void Impact. But it illogically shattered the space far above devil’s head instead. Other powerful demons had blocked this shift in space by using some kind of action. But this devil didn’t even have those.

Void Impact literally just got deflected on its own.

“You distorted dimensions?”

“You’re at least still smart. Of course, it’s my brain.....”

Devil whose eyes were unnaturally dyed in black laughed enjoyably. But the details behind that laugh were immensely preposterous.

Add had once pondered how nice it would be to have the dimension distortion field that reduced physical damage active all the time..... But that was impossible.

Spaces were all connected. Add’s space related abilities turned space coordinate’s constants into a variable to bring about various phenomenon. Space constant’s coordinates were always changing so there was a need to constantly recalculate them. And Dynamo that calculated those formulas functioned from Add’s mental energy.

Thus, dimension distortion drained Add’s mental energy just from being maintained, and trying to move the dimension distortion or keeping it maintained for a long period of time drained him even more drastically. He would dry up and die within 10 minutes if he tried to keep it deployed all the time.

But that devil had layers of dimension distortion that could defend against all attacks all around his body and he was keeping them constantly maintained. Add could understand this theoretically but he couldn't even grasp the principle that made this possible.

Power that absolutely surpassed all standards.

“W, who are you.....?”

“Don't you already know?”

“.....”

He didn't know the reason, he didn't know how this situation came about, but he at least knew who that was.

This powerful but ruthless devil was..... Add himself!

But how was something like this possible? His heart had understood but his head couldn't. It was so shocking and horrible that he wanted to deny this truth in front of his eyes.

Seeing that Add was caught up in an intense emotion and wasn't able to say anything, devil narrowed his eyes. As if he was disappointed.

“Alright..... Be gone now.”

Seeing that devil was trying to snap his finger again..... Add came to his senses and quickly opened up a space distortion. He could think about why later! Surviving... saving everyone came first!

“Everyone gather around me!!”

The El Search Party was instantly freed from the gravity pressing down on their bodies soon as Add's dimension distortion field opened. Everyone tried to gather around Add right away but devil snapping his finger was faster.

Snap!

Shatter!! A chilling sound was heard then the dimension distortion was shattered instantly. Add who was standing at the front most spot instantly got covered in blood.

He would have died instantly if he hadn't instinctively covered his face with both of his arms. But the cost of surviving wasn't light. 4 out of 6 Dynamos were destroyed, and his arms must have gotten broken because they didn't move properly.

He was about to faint from the pain..... But no words came from his mouth.

Ah, damn. Come to think it, why do I always stand up front to block when my body isn't even built strongly? So this was how the habit he's gotten into every time he opened dimension distortion came back to haunt him?

Add clenched his teeth and admitted that he just instantly became incapable of fighting. Nothing could be done anymore. Add was able to protect the others from devil's light attack by sacrificing his dimension distortion field, Dynamos and his arms.

But he couldn't block it anymore.

"Add, back out!!"

Eve quickly tried to open up Atomic Shield but Add already knew that it didn't have any meaning.

They couldn't beat this devil no matter what. No, never mind winning, they will all die in this place today. Add knew this in his head but realized nothing could be done to prevent it.

"Then get lost."

Devil smiled coldly and snapped his finger again. But the space in front of Add suddenly got twisted as it swallowed up devil's formless attack.

It wasn't something Add did. His Dynamos were already destroyed.

Pa-ching!!

"Enjoying bullying those that are weaker than you, D?"

One that appeared by shattering through the twisted space was none other than Aisha. Add and the others looked at her in surprise. Aisha frowned then scolded Elsword.

"I told you to call me if you were in danger. Why didn't you call me?"

"Hahahaha, ahahahahaha,....."

Devil was shaking from laughter. He then overly shook his head.

"Are you finally crazy? You'll lose to me if you fight here, Dimension Princess. You've avoided fighting me all this time. What's gotten into you to appear here right now?"

"I don't want to tire out my mouth by explaining to a fool, Prince of Time."

"It's not prince, it's King. I'm King of Time....."

"Aren't you embarrassed about proclaiming that to yourself?"

Aisha shot back then slightly turned to look at Add, then Ara. Add who was easing his arm's pain using an anesthetic ampoule didn't know what her gaze meant.

“Then allow me to tear you apart with everything I got, Dimension Princess!”

“Do you really think you can? Blizzard Shower!!”

Aisha summoned a giant ice storm with one hand then showered down lightning with her other hand. Helputt, Ran and others standing at the back quickly defended. But devil sneered without even moving a finger.

Devil didn't even take any action and yet.....not even a single hair of his was harmed amidst the waltz of ice storm and lightings.

“Is that all you got? I was looking forward to fighting you. It won't even be a warm-up exercise like this!!”

“Chain Fire Ball!!”

Aisha didn't answer and fired continuous orbs of fire. But a dark space opened up in the fireballs' trajectory then the fireballs started falling down from above Aisha's head. But Aisha lightly waved her hand as if she had anticipated his counter then threw the fireballs back at devil again.

“Magic Missile!!”

Fireballs still didn't work but Aisha already had her next magic prepared.

It was such a high level fight that it felt like the El Search Party trying to help would only get in Aisha's way. Feeling the anesthetic's effect kicking in, Add despaired.

“.....It's no use.”

Aisha who boasted enough power to seal up entire Velder with a spatial barrier was pouring out all sorts of magic. But devil didn't even blink an eye and not even a single strand of his hair was hurt. On the contrary, Aisha was getting pushed back gradually.

They couldn't beat him after all.

Elesis, Raven and Helputt didn't join the demons for no reason. It was no wonder why Karis boasted, and it was no wonder why Chloe cowered.

A monster that had been transforming the world to suit his taste and changed everyone's destinies however he liked.

Literally, the devil.

Add realized why he had continued to fail. It was because he couldn't beat that guy. This was the finale where everything ended here again.

Add let out a hollow laugh. Aisha was fighting bravely but she won't be able to hold out long.

Only thing left was to all die together.

But Ara seemed she had a different idea.

"Mr.Add! We'll hold this place, get out of here now!"

At what Ara said while grasping her spear tightly, the other members who had been looking at Aisha and devil's battle came to their senses and each added a word.

"That would be for the best."

"Get away far as you can."

"Big Brother, hurry up and go!"

Add blinked blankly at their words that continued. They couldn't possibly be saying such things unless they were all high on some kind of drug.

"How am I supposed to escape from here? No, what's the use in me escaping by myself?"

You could tell with a single glance that this devil was a terrifyingly powerful existence.

"You cannot continue to battle anymore. Think about the future and escape."

"Don't make me laugh....."

Add burst out in anger in response to Eve. But Eve took a slight glance towards the broken Dynamos that were scattered on the floor. She hadn't said anything but Add couldn't continue his words.

Add with his Dynamos broken and body injured was only a burden.

"Big Brother, hurry up and go."

In that moment, Elsword turned towards the place where the intense battle was occurring then grabbed his sword. Elsword's sword got enlarged and started shining with radiant light as if it was answering to its master's will. Add instinctively recognised that Elsword had become much more powerful than before, possibly even more powerful than him. But Add had no intention to listen to him.

Everything was already over.

"Mr.Add! We'll only be able to win if Mr.Add escapes from here! Please trust what I say!!"

“.....”

Ara spoke desperately but Add shook his head. She must have seen something with her foresight ability but Add couldn't help but to deny that possibility.

Now that the nausea and loathing had passed, after the anesthetic circulated through his body, he could speak somewhat calmly.

“You guys..... don't you all get what situation this is?”

“What do you mean?”

At Eve's question, Add continued his words with an indescribable feeling. He discovered the cause of everything that happened so far.

“That guy..... is me.”

“You two do look alike.”

Add nodded at Eve's cool words. How should he explain this? It wasn't just their faces that looked alike. He didn't need any explanation from anyone else. He could tell instinctively soon as he saw.

That devil was him from the future.

The one who kept standing in his, and the El Search Party's way was Add from the future. This was the truth. So what hope was there even if he ran away right now? How can he ever speak of victory?

He now understood why there were 20 million failures, why Eun had hidden information from him.

Where in the world was there a way for a human to defeat the devil?

Only thing left now was **Death**.

“We can't win. We'll never win. Nothing will change even if I run away right now. We just... lost. I'm sorry. I ruined everything. I was the cause of everything. All the fights we had until now were meaningless! We were all just thoroughly toyed around on top of that devil's palm!!”

Add cried out while looking at the death in front of him. After the horror and rage had passed, only resignation remained.

All the battles they had been through until now, everything he tried to achieve by even resorting to rewinding time, all the emotions..... were getting shattered and broken.

Only a sorry feeling remained. Because he could certainly tell that he was the cause of this situation.

“Sorry, I’m sorry everyone. But.... We’re done for.”

No one answered to the confession Add made with his head down. They must have understood what Add meant, even Ara and Chung kept their silence. Sounds of whirling storms and lightning could be heard not too far away. But the only thing people here could share was silence.

“Go, Big Brother Add.”

Then Elsword spoke silently. What came into Add’s view as he raised his head was Elsword’s back, Elsword looking at the battle between Aisha and devil.

“.....I’ll join in.”

Ara’s hair turned white then she suddenly jumped into the battle between Aisha and devil. It was an act of suicide with Ara’s skills but judging from the tone of her voice, that just now was Eun.

“I’ll also support with cannon fire!”

Chung followed after Eun and moved to give ranged support. Only ones left were Elsword, Eve and Add.

Elsword continued his words while still looking at the fight. He wanted to join the fight even right now, but he was standing here suppressing himself because he couldn’t finish these words if he joined right now.

“We won’t be able to win this time, but make it so we can win next time, Big Brother.”

“.....What are you saying? We’re done for now. Only death remains.”

Could it be that Elsword couldn’t understand their current situation? They were still at a disadvantage even if Aisha, Eun and Chung fought together. Not only that, there were still Ran, Helputt, Raven and Elesis standing ready at the back.

Overwhelming odds, there wasn’t any kind of miracle that would bring victory to the El Search Party right now. Not screaming was the only remaining defiance Add could manage.

But Elsword spoke composedly

“Go through time, Big Brother.”

Add's pupils suddenly widened. Elsword was still showing only his back so Add couldn't see his face.

Add composed his words sparsely, with a shaking voice, like a person who had forgotten how to speak.

"You, h, how.....?"

"I got that kind of feeling while fighting Big Sister. Go, Big Brother. We can't win now, but make it so we can win next time."

"I understand. Go now, Add." Eve joined in.

"What nonsense are you saying.....?"

"If that is your form in the future, then it's you who have to find out a way to win. Quickly, time travel if you can. We'll buy you time."

Eve would have normally brushed off time travel as nonsense but her tone right now was as if she wasn't going to question about it. Her tone was as if since devil was already running rampant in front of them and Elsword had said so, there was no need for further discussions.

Add blinked quietly looking at Elsword and Eve standing next to each other with their backs turned towards him. Add then clenched his fists tightly.

"No, it's the same no matter how many times I try. I can't beat that guy even if I run away jumping through time!!"

Add shook his head. He didn't want to anymore. There was no way a method to win against that kind of terrifying devil existed in the world. He wanted to just give up now.

He didn't want to run away knowing that Eve will be destroyed.

He didn't want to run away and leave the others to die.

He was now absolutely sick of leaving someone behind to die. He didn't want to shout one more time against a foe that he knew he couldn't defeat, a foe he challenged for 20 million times but still couldn't defeat.

He didn't want to turn his back on these guys relying on such an uncertain hope, on an absurd chance.

"I'd rather die here fighting together with all of you!!"

Just like that day when everyone united their hearts to fight against Elesis who revealed her true power. Add shouted with a burning voice. Even if they were to die, he wanted to die fighting together with them. He didn't want to run away because of an excuse called next chance.

“.....”

Elsword and Eve looked back with surprised expressions.

“I didn't know Big Brother Add could say such words.”

“It's really surprising.”

Add strongly stomped his feet at their continuing voices. He wasn't in any mood for jokes.

“Don't make fun of me!! I.....”

“I know, Add.”

Eve smiled. While Add was at a loss for words at the smile he saw for the first time, Elsword added.

“I know. That's why we'll entrust you with this. Make it so we can win next time. Only one who can do that is you, Big Brother.”

“.....”

Add lost his battle capabilities now that 4 of his Dynamos were destroyed. It was questionable if time travel would even be possible in this state. Even if it was possible, there was no grantee that he will be able to time travel safely.

If what would happen was uncertain anyways, then he just wanted to die fighting together with all of them.

“You idiots.....”

Why weren't they saying any words of resentment to him even in a moment like this? They should have realized the one who brought about this entire catastrophe was Add. But Elsword and Eve smiled then turned their heads forwards again.

The situation was turning disadvantageous even though Eun had joined in. Devil laughed loudly as he attacked for real this time.

“Void Impact..... Quintuple!!”

With devil's shout, space continuously collapsed five times. Even if Eun and Aisha had some distances from devil, this was an attack that looped around them so both of them quickly backed out. But they couldn't dodge the electric currents being discharged from the Dynamos.

“Kugh!”

“Ack!!”

Even while staggering, Aisha and Eun managed to fall back towards where Elsword and Eve were. They had only withstood because they had strong resistance against electric attacks. Normal people would have burned to death instantly. Chung who had been giving long range support also regrouped.

It was no use even though Aisha and Eun gave all they had. Then there was only one thing left to do. Elsword made his decision.

“Everyone.... We’ll buy time for Big Brother Add to escape!”

“Who agreed?!”

Add screamed and tried to stop them when Eun raised her voice.

“Dynamo!! Emergency activation! Code: Battle Seraph!”

“What!?”

Only Add should be able to activate the Dynamos. But 2 Dynamos that were still unharmed moved and immediately created a space-time wormhole. Add realized this and quickly attempted to move away from it. But a giant white fox suddenly jumped out of Ara’s hairpin then threw herself at Add.

“Kuaaaaaagh!!”

Add got pushed back all the way near the space-time wormhole because of the fox that suddenly appeared. This fox, Eun had at least controlled her strength because she wasn’t intending to harm Add. So Add didn’t get completely pushed into the wormhole.

Elsword and Eve looked at Add for a moment then smiled again.

“Hurry up and go, Big Brother.”

“I ask of you, Add.”

“Hey! Don’t make me laugh!! Don’t make me laugh!! Who’s running away!? Who’s running away leaving you guys behind!? Let go of me you damned fox!! Get out of my way!!”

Add kept battering Eun’s back and head but he was no match for her in size so he was getting pushed back towards the wormhole little by little. Ara who came to her senses bowed her head as she looked at Add.

“Mr.Add, please take good care of Lord Eun!”

“Go, Mr.Add. I’ll see you next time.”

“Don’t joke with me!!! I’m not going!!”

But his body continued to get pushed back. Elsword and Eve watched Add getting pushed back and spoke quietly.

“Then let’s..... fight together again next time, Big Brother Add.”

“Take care of yourself, Add.”

“Uuughh!!”

Add was trying to hold on but his legs had already entered. He raised his voice as he looked at the backs of Elsword, Eve, Ara and Chung as they turned towards the devil.

“You idiots! You idiots!! How dare you come up with this kind of stupid plan on your own!!?”

“Let’s go, boy.”

Add ignored Eun’s words and desperately stretched his hand forwards with all the strength he had. It was an already pulverized arm that didn’t move properly. It wouldn’t reach no matter how much he stretched it out, but he still couldn’t give up.

Add’s hand sorrowfully stretched out towards the back of his friends.

“Don’t just send me by myself!!”

End of his cry. Add’s body and Eun entered the space-time wormhole.

That hand couldn’t reach anyone in the end.



When Add's voice couldn't be heard anymore, Elsword apologized to everyone as he raised his sword.

"I'm sorry everyone. For making all of you follow what I said without explaining properly."

"I'm fine, Lord Eun explained it to me."

Ara who was now separated from Eun stood beside Elsword and fixed her spear. Eve also answered while looking at the enemy.

"I don't know in exact detail about time travel, but I have no choice but to believe since the evidence is right in front of our eyes."

"That's..... Mr.Add in the future?"

Chung asked carefully as he looked at the devil that was making a bored face. Aisha answered shortly.

"It's too complicated to explain. And I think there won't be any time to explain. I'll try everything I can.....so all of you follow up accordingly."

As Aisha's words ended, everyone made their resolves and prepared to fight. Devil looked at them with a bored expression then judged.

"How stupid, your so called plan was to join strengths with these rubbishes, Dimension Princess?"

"This isn't something I came up with."

"I was quite anticipating our battle..... What were you thinking appearing now when you knew very well that you'll never defeat me if you fought me here? Why didn't you abandon those idiots this time?"

"....."

"How boring. Fine, I'll kill all of you then get rid of the one that ran away. Then I'll turn back everything again. I'll only have to put in slight more effort this time."

Elsword took a step forwards.

"You're not going anywhere."

".....You trash. Do you really think you can face me, King of Time, with such puny sword skills? I'm death and darkness!! I'm destruction and despair!! I don't require any effort to erase you guys from this world!"

Devil was glaring at Elsword with an extremely displeased expression. He actually could quickly get rid of Elsword if he decided to.

“I won’t allow you do that!”

“I’ll fight proudly representing Hamel.”

“Eve, ready.”

Devil’s eyes as he stared at Eve seemed to slightly shake. But he quickly lowered and shook his head. Then after a long moment, devil raised his head and looked at Ara and Chung with a gaze filled with contempt.

Devil finally looked at Aisha then asked.

“Did you throw yourself away just to save these trashes, Dimension Princess? You’ve become very foolish since the last time we met.”

“They are not trashes. They are friends.”

Elsword grabbed his sword tightly as he corrected the devil. Elsword added one more line when the devil stared at him displeasingly.

“And I’m sure of one thing. You’re not Big Brother Add.”

“.....What?”

“Big Brother Add doesn’t call us trashes. Although he does call us idiots.”

Seeing that the devil was dumfounded, Ara added.

“But he takes cares of us a lot!”

“Although the way he does it is a bit strange.”

“.....I ended up cross-dressing by myself.”

After everyone each gave their words, Elsword summed it up again.

“Big Brother Add is our precious friend. Until he comes back again..... You can’t leave this place.”

“Kukukukuk, Kuahahahah!! So things like this can happen too when you keep turning back time, funny, this is so funny!!”

Devil burst out laughing as he mocked the El Search Party. But no one cared. Everyone’s hearts were one.

They couldn’t win right now no matter how much they fought. They will probably lose. It won’t end just with their defeat, they will die.

“Big Brother Add will make us win next time.”

Everyone nodded wordlessly at Elsword's words. They all didn't know much about time travel, but this devil they had to face right now was the proof that it was possible.

Fact that there could be a different future than now was being proved by the enemy's existence.

"Everyone, let's go!!"

Elsword grabbed his Armageddon Blade and charged towards the laughing devil. He heard Eve following right behind him, he saw Ara who ran in much faster attacking the devil, he sensed Chung preparing to support, sensed that Aisha was about to pour down series of magic powerful enough to shake the world. Everyone's hearts gathered as one to fight desperately in order to defeat the devil.

But they will lose. They'll be defeated. They won't be able to beat that devil.

Elsword knew this instinctively but didn't stop running. He didn't withdraw strength from the hands gripping his sword. Rather, he felt more strength rising up from within him.

They'll lose this time, but they'll be able to win next time.

"Haaaaaaah!!"

Elsword jumped strongly then smashed down his sword on the devil with everything he had.

It wasn't that they weren't afraid of death.

But they could fight by staking everything.

Even if the thing waiting for them at the end of this fight was despair,

Because they believe.....

In their friend that they parted with,

That there will come a day when everyone will fight together and win.